

Medical Commander Addresses Health Issues

By: Lt. Col. Mickey Melton
36th Medical Group commander

Unfortunately, it's a fact: We're all going to die some day. For generations, man has sought the fountain of continual youth. Our nation's plastic surgeons have no lack of patients requesting lifts, cosmetic surgery, fat suctioning and tummy tucks and buttocks tightening.

Yet, some people still don't seem to get the message. How many are still enslaved by tobacco, still eat whatever pleases their taste at anytime the urge moves them, live sedentary lifestyles while refusing regular exercise, cannot control their alcohol consumption, and continue playing Russian roulette with their sexual habits?

Our nation is in a medical cost crisis and it's not the industry's fault--it's ours. There's a segment of our population requiring costly medical care to maintain it's way of life -- largely due to a lack of responsibility.

It's a fact--20 percent of the population accounts for more than 70 percent of the demand on our medical services. The U.S. spends 14 percent of it's gross domestic product on medical care--more than \$900 billion a year, or over \$3,000 per person per year, for every man, woman and child. It's far more than any other nation.

Did you know:

- * \$2.8 million a year is spent on smoking-related medical care for active duty members;
- * About 40 percent of Air Force's preventable duty time lost is due to alcohol related incidents;
- * Smokers return three times more often than non-smokers for medical treatment of upper respiratory infections;
- * Smokers average six more visits to the physician every year compared to non-smokers;
- * Children of smokers average four more visits to the pediatrician every year than children on non-smokers;
- * 70 percent of patients in intensive care units get there as a result of alcohol and/or tobacco related causes; and
- * The military has a higher percentage of smokers than our civilian counterparts?

Air Force Chief of Staff General Ronald Fogleman recently articulated the core values of our institution; integrity first, service before self and excellence in all we do.

Are our bodies physically capable of serving the mission before self? Is the health of the fighting force in as excellent a condition as can be? The Air Force is rapidly moving toward a program called Put Prevention Into Practice. Now just suppose your physician has a health report card on you, or an Air Force physician/provider

has documented your health status in your medical record.

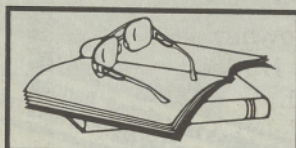
Will taxpayers continue letting the Air Force pay for medical care needed by patients/beneficiaries who repeatedly get counseled on their responsibilities for maintaining/improving their health?

It's a free country and it's certainly everyone's right to treat their body exactly as they wish, but taxpayers certainly don't have to pay for the medical care.

So, what's my point? I'd hate to see one person's life shortened when it could have been lengthened considerably through decisive, personal action and changes in habit. I'm not saying it's easy to quit smoking, eat healthy, exercise regularly, learn stress relief techniques, adopt moral practices that will preclude catching/spreading sexually transmitted diseases, keep your cholesterol level below 200, and limit or eliminate the use of alcohol.

Team Andersen has several support services to assist in this transition--the medical group, base chapel or church, family support services, or the fitness center. Please, take health and wellness seriously. It's one of the most important things you can do for yourself, your family, your Air Force and your nation.

(Lt. Col. Mickey Melton is a Siletz Tribal Member)



RESOLUTIONS

But, from what you hear, the rate of fulfilling resolutions is not very high. What's going on?

Many people honestly believe they will stick to their New Year's commitments. But they often fail to, either because of lack of willpower or because the habit they want to break is just too powerful. A lifelong routine of eating calorie-laden chocolate snacks is not easily dismissed.

Sometimes, the resolution is broken because its novelty wears off. Or cold realization sets in, and it's obvious that 35 pounds can't be lost in three months. But perhaps the most honest reason for ditching a pledge is a conflict with social and business life. It's difficult to run a mile at noon when you're at a working lunch. And it's nearly impossible to eat a leisurely dinner if you're late for the PTA meeting or the washing machine is overflowing.

So, why do people bother to make resolutions? For several reasons. They may be ready for self-improvement and see this as a good way to begin. They may want to test their willpower. Perhaps they see such promises as a way to achieve health and fitness, or they might have made resolutions because their friends were doing it and they wanted to be a part of the group.

Then there are traditionalists who think that resolutions are a pact with fate. They'll tell you they've always made resolutions on the first of the year, and they don't want to break the cycle.

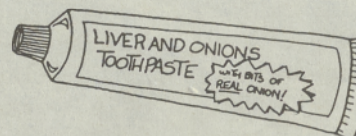
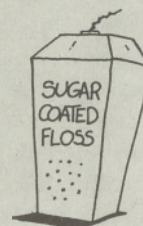
Finally, there are the true believers -- people who really believe making a resolution will rid them of bad habits.

You hear it every January 1: A promise to quit smoking, to diet, to read a good book. It has become a tradition -- making New Year's resolutions -- and we all promise to keep them.

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By Leigh Rubin

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