

## **MODERN U.S. HEALTHCARE, WHERE ARE WE GOING?**

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We spend a great majority of our lives contributing to the society, and we expect our healthcare system to provide for our basic healthcare needs. Yet, it is a system that primarily focuses on disease management rather than health promotion. Unfortunately, even the very function of disease management may not have been satisfactorily performed by our current system. Does it sound all too familiar to some of us who has experienced the so-called health insurance “run-around”? Under the pretense of an attempt to control healthcare costs, certain tests are only partially covered or are not approved at all, and prior authorization is often required for this test or that medication, and yet insurance premium shows no sign of decline. Is such an insurance-driven disease-based healthcare system the only way for modern healthcare delivery?

The American ideal is founded upon liberty, and freedom cannot truly exist without choices. However, this is precisely the problem we now face with our healthcare system, namely its lack of options. For some strange reason, the cost of healthcare has been inflated so high that only the wealthiest can afford unless there is health insurance. But then it becomes too obvious that every individual who subsequently seeks healthcare has to go through the same loop, the insurance hurdle, and comes with it the various types of restrictions! In an ideal free enterprise society, there must be choices, and healthcare is of no exception. By offering more options, we are not encouraging healthcare disparity but rather promoting diversity. In an era when healthcare consumers are increasingly responsible for their own healthcare expenditures with higher co-pays and deductibles, more choices should be offered to consumers, and especially to those who may be interested in services not traditionally covered by conventional insurance plans. The notion that someone else will pay for *all* our healthcare needs simply does not exist. Since we progressively have to pay more and more, would we rather pay for services that focus more on health promotion than just disease management?

Our healthcare system may appear to be part of a giant network of conspiracy. Associating with the growth of both the fast food and processed food industries, we are rapidly becoming an unprecedented obese society. With the increasing level of stress from our work responsibilities, family duties, interpersonal relationships, and financial obligations, we progressively become more engaged in emotional eating and less in therapeutic exercise. Such a society thus imposes upon our population a greater risk of developing stress and obesity-related diseases. Due to the increasingly dwindling insurance reimbursement, most healthcare providers can no longer afford adequate time for lifestyle counseling but need to resort to a high volume practice in order to make their ends meet, and thus they simply have to rely more on medications to treat their patients, often controlling only symptoms without resolving the underlying causes, who perpetually may become more dependent on drugs, without which their conditions inevitably will recur and worsen, let alone the side effects of which that may demand even more medications to be taken in order to counter the initial adverse reactions, and interestingly this may also appear to be exactly what the pharmaceutical industries desire.

Thus, what could be the potential solution? First, we need to understand the concept of health and disease. Absence of illness does not automatically mean achievement of health! Not being poor does not mean being wealthy; and not failing an exam does not mean obtaining an “A”. Health span is a spectrum, a continuum, like a rainbow, and cannot be categorized simply as all or none, sick or not sick. Disease is at one end of the spectrum whereas health occupies the other. Health insurance should really be interpreted as *disease* insurance only! Despite the fact that modern medical technologies may *prolong* life span, they do not necessarily *improve* health span. Being *alive* does not equate to being *lively*! Quantity does not always lead to quality. Disease management is simply not the same as health promotion!

Second, we need to appreciate the importance of health promotion through prevention. Despite having the highest healthcare expenditures in the world, we do not rank the healthiest when compared with other industrialized nations. In fact, we are now witnessing an increased incidence of chronic diseases with an earlier onset. This implies that our population is becoming sick at a younger age, and since we can now live longer due to advanced medical technology, we will simply utilize the healthcare system longer, and thus creating more burdens to the already stressed system. This is one of the main factors that drives up healthcare costs. Indeed, 20 percent of patients account for 80 percent of healthcare expenditures, and that 20 percent is made up mostly of the chronically ill with multiple medical conditions. Most healthcare experts would agree that prevention is potentially the most cost-effective and beneficial route to improve health. Numerous studies indicate an annual savings of \$100 billion as well as increased longevity and quality of life if healthcare providers will promote prevention. Thus, we shall *not* go to our healthcare providers only when we are sick. The same concept can be applied to our cars. We will not want to go to our car mechanics only when our vehicles break down. Hopefully, we will have oil change and tune up our vehicles even though our car insurance does not necessarily pay for those services. We will still wear seat belts and drive prudently despite the fact that we have car insurance. When our cars do break down, we can easily change parts or even get new ones. However, this is not so easily achievable for our bodies, and after all, we hope we do worth more than our vehicles. Therefore, let our healthcare providers help us to stay healthy and vibrant through prevention. The healthier we are, the less we have to worry about being sick and feeling miserable, and the less we have to concern about arguing with health insurance companies for coverage. Perhaps the time has come for an alternate model of healthcare delivery in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one that changes from the *fast-paced, volume-based, assembly-line, impersonalized, and reactive conventional medicine to the time-devoting, quality-driven, patient-oriented, individualized, and proactive integrative holistic medicine* that focuses on prevention and wellness; addresses the whole person, body, mind and spirit; incorporates complementary and alternative medical therapies; and promotes optimal health far beyond the mere absence of disease!

*To gain a hundred victories in a hundred battles is not highest excellence; to subjugate the enemy's army without doing battle is the highest of excellence.*

Sun Tzu

*To fight and conquer all illnesses is not supreme excellence; to break the disease's resistance without fighting is supreme excellence. Prevention is key.*

Dr. Kevin Chan

Dr. Kevin Chan's Bio:

Dr. Chan holds an undergraduate degree in neural science and a graduate degree in physiology. After obtaining his medical degree, Dr. Chan completed his residency in family medicine and fellowship in preventive medicine, focusing in occupational and environmental medicine. Dr. Chan further specializes in functional medicine and is board certified in both family medicine and integrative holistic medicine.