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Preventive Medicine

Volume 16, Issue 1, January 1987, Pages 119-130

Clinical perspectives

Promoting health and preventing disease in health care settings: An analysis of barriers

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[https://doi.org/10.1016/0091-7435\(87\)90011-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/0091-7435(87)90011-9)

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Abstract

Changes in lifestyle that promote health-enhancing behaviors and inhibit health-compromising behaviors have been recommended by the U.S. Surgeon General as an integral component of our general strategy for improving the health of the nation. A variety of innovations including new knowledge, new products, and new services have been developed with this recommendation in mind, and a major objective of these efforts is to identify settings for the effective diffusion and adoption of these new approaches into population groups that can make use of them. Health care settings such as hospitals, clinics, community health centers, health maintenance organizations, and private physicians' offices offer unique possibilities in this regard. Though opportunities exist for promoting health and preventing disease in other settings like schools and worksites, the primary objectives of such organizations are unrelated to

health. Despite the obvious potential, however, our health care system has, in general, retained as its primary emphasis the treatment of disease rather than the enhancement of health. This article reviews the opportunities for health promotion and disease prevention in health care settings and identifies a range of barriers to such efforts. These barriers are discussed within a framework that focuses on dissemination and implementation as critical steps in the knowledge transfer process. Strategies for overcoming these barriers are described within the context of general linkage theory.



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 Supported in part by Grant CA38219 from the National Cancer Institute.

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