

Heart Disease: Still the Number One Cause of Death!

Summary of Significant Trends:

Despite all the efforts to the contrary, heart disease remains the leading cause of death for men and women of every race in North Carolina.¹ The decline in heart disease over the past 30 years has slowed during the last ten years.¹ In 2001, in N.C., 18,729 people died from diseases of the heart. About the same number of females (9,434) as males (9,295) died while more whites (14,759) than blacks (3,772) died.² Each year over 22,000 North Carolinians ages 45-64 are hospitalized for a first heart attack.³

Emerging Trends and Issues:

Chronic diseases such as heart disease exact a particularly heavy burden on North Carolinians because they contribute to long-term illness, diminish quality of life, and greatly increase health care costs. In fact, heart disease is a major cause of hospitalizations and disability, and accounts for a significant proportion of health care costs each year.⁴

The costs aren't available for NC specifically but for the nation as a whole the economic cost of heart disease in 2002 was projected in 2001 by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute to be \$329 billion, of which \$199 billion was to be for health-related expenditures and \$130 billion was to be due to lost productivity.⁵

More than half of the population in North

Carolina with heart disease is under the age of 65. Many times those with heart disease are more limited in their activities than healthier individuals, including work issues, as follows⁶:

- Heart disease is the leading cause of premature, permanent disability in the U.S. labor force.
- Labor force participation is lower for the population with heart disease compared to the population without it.
- Workers who are limited by heart disease earn less than workers who do not have heart disease problems.
- Health care service use and cost is greater for those with heart disease.

More than 65% of Americans aged 65 years or older have some form of cardiovascular disease. In 2001 in North Carolina, 14,957 of the 18,729 people who died from diseases of the heart were aged 65 and over. The aging of North Carolina's population is likely to increase the incidence of heart disease in North Carolina and may further slow or reverse the decades-long downward trend in death rates.²

North Carolina's high prevalence rates of major behavioral risk factors also portend further reversals in the progress made toward reducing the incidence and toll exacted by heart disease. Examples include: 80 percent of the adult population in North Carolina do not get the recommended amount of physical activity each

day;² 79% of NC adults do not eat the daily recommended number of fruits and vegetables (5 or more fruits and vegetables daily);⁵ and 26% of NC adults reported that they had not had their cholesterol checked within the past 5 years.⁵

Relevance of Trends to County Programs:

Many forms of heart disease are largely preventable. Controlling conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes and engaging in a healthy lifestyle can reduce the risk of heart disease. A healthy life style can reduce the risk of heart disease by as much as 80%. People who are not overweight, do not smoke, consume about one alcoholic drink a day, exercise vigorously for 30 minutes a day or more and eat a low-fat, high-fiber diet have the lowest risk for heart disease. Although the task is daunting, the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service is prepared to educate and disseminate reliable, non-biased, research-based information to all North Carolinians to lower their risk of heart disease through diet and lifestyle change. Programs available include: Give Your Heart A Healthy Beat, Partners in Wellness, and Noonliting.

References:

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3. National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, FY 2001. Fact Book. Chapter 2 Overview, page 12. www.nhlbi.nih.gov
4. "Heart Disease A Disabling Yet Preventable Condition" in the series: Challenges for the 21st Century: Chronic and Disabling Condition. National Academy on American Aging Society, No. 3, Jan. 2000
5. Health Risks Among North Carolina Adults: 1999, A Report From the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Division of Public Health, State Center for Health Statistics May, 2001.

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