

Health Report Shows Leap in Technology Use

BY MARY ANN MOON

The use of medical technology has grown dramatically over the last decade, according to the federal government's annual health report.

That's just one finding in the massive "Health, United States, 2009," a snapshot of Americans' health, which the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention compiles yearly as "an essential step in making sound health policy and setting research and program priorities."

This year's edition, the 33rd, includes a special section on medical technology, which includes procedures, tests, drugs, devices, and support systems such as computerized records. The principal findings in this section include:

► The use of MRI, CT, and PET imaging soared during the past decade. The number of such imaging studies either ordered or provided by physician offices and hospital outpatient departments more than tripled; those ordered or provided by

emergency departments quadrupled.

► The rate of angioplasty without stent placement declined by 80% during the past decade. Drug-eluting stents have rapidly replaced bare-metal stents and were used in 75% of angioplasties in 2006.

► The use of antidiabetic drugs among patients aged 45 and older increased approximately 50%, and that of statins soared tenfold in the past decade.

► The percentage of people taking at least 1 prescription drug during the preceding month rose from 38% in the 1980s and 1990s to 47% in recent years. The percentage taking 3 or more prescription drugs also increased, from 11% to 21%, during that time.

► The rate of outpatient upper endoscopies rose by 90% and the rate of outpatient colonoscopy tripled during the same interval.

The report also detailed trends in mortality. Both life expectancy and infant mortality have been improving but con-

tinued to lag behind levels found in most developed countries. Infant mortality in the United States is now 27% lower than it was in 1990.

American men now can expect to live 3.5 years longer, and women can expect to live 1.6 years longer, than they did in 1990. Overall life expectancy in the U.S. was 77.9 years in 2007, a record high.

Life expectancy increased more among blacks than among whites, but a gap between the races still persists. In 1990, life expectancy for whites was 7 years longer than that for blacks; by 2007, that gap narrowed to 4.6 years.

Mortality from heart disease, stroke, and cancer continues to decline, while mortality from chronic respiratory diseases and unintentional injuries has remained stable. The leading cause of death for people aged 1-44 years is unintentional injuries, for people aged 45-64 years is cancer, and for people aged 65 and older is heart disease.

With regard to chronic physical, men-

tal, or emotional conditions, the report noted that the proportion of working-age adults who reported that a chronic condition limited their activity has remained steady at approximately 10%. Arthritis and other musculoskeletal disorders were the most frequent causes of such limitations in adults, while learning disabilities, ADD, and ADHD were among school-aged children.

Mental illness was the second-leading cause of limitation due to chronic conditions in adults aged 18-44 years; heart and circulatory disorders were the second-leading cause in older adults, but mental illness was frequently cited in this age group as well.

Among younger children, speech impairment and asthma were commonly cited chronic conditions that limited activity. In older children and adolescents, mental, emotional, or behavioral problems were frequently cited.

The full report is available at www.cdc.gov/nchs/hus.htm. ■

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