

THE SOBERING TRUTH ABOUT HEALTH TRENDS

BY DR. SUSAN MAPLES

"Healthy Citizens are the greatest asset any country can have!" – Winston Churchill 1874-1965

Many of us live in a bubble, eating kale smoothies, going to the gym and optimistically imagining that our country's health is actually improving. Truth is, we are heading toward a health care crisis of crippling proportion. Recent studies and U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) projections report that by 2050 our nation's population will be a whopping 42 percent obese, one in three diabetic and almost half will be diagnosed with cardiovascular disease. As Americans, we ought to be outraged by these statistics.

Meanwhile our government has been engaged in a decade-long struggle, trying to build a big enough umbrella to cover the escalating cost of our declining health. But here's a wakeup call: *Did you know that 75 percent of our healthcare costs today are for preventable illness?* That means if we were truly able to prevent these lifestyle-related illnesses there would be no health care catastrophe at all.

Can we be haunted by that statistic, given the feeble emphasis on prevention as a strategy? Along with sick-care we could be focusing on *health-care*, and

addressing the root cause of our demise. Why aren't we going there? (You already know the answer.) It's because the giants—big food and beverage, pharmaceutical, tobacco, insurance companies and lobbyists—are profiting on the backs of our illnesses—and paying our taxes. It's a shortsighted answer to our economic stress.

So, we cling to hope that a U.S. health care policy will waive a magic wand. With no disrespect to the policy designers, who are mired in its complexity, I'd like to propose they expand their focus: Instead of arranging more and more buckets under the massively leaky ceiling, they have the political courage to climb up on the roof and fix the primary causes.

But for now, while the Food and Drug Administration negligently looks aside, and our government preaches *individual responsibility* as a solution, we must push each other into action.

Kids are Our Hope for a Better Future!

Turning the health trend upward is going to take a keen focus on younger generations. If you know kids you can influence, please get involved. We need parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles,

friends and teachers who are willing to prepare real food for meals and snacks; helping kids to kick sugary drinks and stop eating from a box or a bag. Prepping *real* food—with kids—is fun. Plus, it models healthy behavior for a lifetime. Be brave enough to *stop* buying juice boxes, sports drinks, soda, sugared-up breakfast cereal, refined (hydrogenated fat-laden) peanut butter and snacks with more than three ingredients.

Also, remember that human bodies need *movement*. Challenge children to get as much physical play time as they do screen time. Lastly, nudge your school leaders. Kids deserve evidence-based human health education in their science curriculum.

If you're still reading, you're in my tribe. Let's do this!

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." – Margaret Meade



Dr. Susan Maples is a dentist in Holt. She is also a speaker, health educator and author of *BlabberMouth! 77 Secrets Only Your Mouth Can Tell You to Live a Healthier, Happier, Sexier Life*. Reach her at Susan@DrSusanMaples.com

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