

POLICY FORUM

Heart Disease and Stroke in North Carolina

Introduction

Of the many models describing the development and implementation of public policy perhaps the simplest describes a dynamic interaction between data, strategy, and will.

Proposed by the late pediatrician and Surgeon General Julius Richmond and maternal and child health luminary Milt Kottelchuck, this “data use triangle” suggests that public policy is best shaped when data, or knowledge, informs strategies and interventions. But without political will, even the best information and plans go nowhere. In 1979 Dr. Richmond published *Healthy People: The Surgeon General’s Report on Health Promotion and Disease Prevention*, which contained the first national quantitative goals to measure our success in improving population health. *Healthy People* has been updated every 10 years since. But we need not look so far ahead.

This issue of the NCMJ is a call to action, pulling together the data, the strategies, and the will that seek to save a million lives from heart disease and stroke—30,000 in North Carolina—in the next 5 years.

We know the data: heart disease and stroke stubbornly remain a leading cause of death in our state and country. We know the strategies, and we practice our ABCS—*aspirin use when appropriate, blood pressure management, cholesterol control, and smoking cessation or abstinence*. We learn more each year and apply better and best practices in our medical offices and hospitals, homes and workplaces, and communities and state.

This issue of the NCMJ reminds us that North Carolina has long been a leader in data and strategy. We don’t *lack* plans. From the forward thinking Justus-Warren Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Task Force Plan to the North Carolina Stroke Care Collaborative and the many community based initiatives to improve education, practice, and access, North Carolina is determined to bring data and strategy to implementation.

Does this mean North Carolina has the commitment and will to save 30,000 lives? Have we become inured to the data and complacent with the strategies? Have we simply been polishing the brass and loosening a notch on the buckle of the nation’s stroke belt? This issue says no.

The Million Hearts initiative is more than a slogan or a dream. It is a reality daring to happen. NCMJ

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