

Caring for Our Health: the role of primary care in disease prevention

At the heart of primary care in Belarus is the concept of preventive medicine. The benefits associated with preventive medicine are considerable. Firstly, resources for treatment are not required. Secondly, the individual can continue working and contributing to the economy. Moreover, prevention has a big impact on the improvement of the population's duration and quality of life. With a changing age structure of the population and increasing life expectancy, it is important that prevention should have a high priority in primary care.

Three different aspects (levels) of prevention have to be taken into account by GPs. Primary prevention is the promotion of health and the prevention of disease, which involves vaccination programmes and provision of a safe environment for people. Lifestyle modification (based on advice and encouragement to patients on how to change to healthier behaviours) is a tool to change this at an individual level.

Secondary prevention is connected with the early identification of disease and the provision of prompt treatment to minimize its damage. This can include screening programmes, where tests for specific conditions are carried out on a regular basis. Early diagnosis means that diseases are easier to treat and can be completely cured in some cases.

The third level of prevention (tertiary prevention) is aimed at reducing the effects of disease and disability on the patient, which can involve minimizing the patient's suffering using appropriate analgesia (pain relief) or promoting self-management. A good example of this is with patients who have diabetes.

Targeting three disease linked behaviours provide huge benefits in human and financial terms. The first of these is tobacco smoking, causing high mortality through lung cancer and vascular disease as well as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. The second one is consuming (eating) too many fatty and sugary foods and not exercising which is one of the main causes of diabetes. According to the WHO, diabetes is likely to be one of the most serious threats to human health in the 21st century. If diagnosed early, it can be managed relatively easily.

The third type of disease-linked behaviour is alcohol abuse. Studies show that it can cause significant health problems, liver failure, diabetes and neurological disorders. Therefore, this type of behaviour should be one of the targets of prevention.

Medical professionals have been aware for a long time that population health can be improved by preventive activities.

I. Read the word combinations and give their Russian equivalents.

1. primary care
2. preventative (preventive) medicine
3. the main priority
4. benefits, beneficial
5. to take into account
6. primary prevention
7. promotion of health
8. to provide a safe environment
9. lifestyle modification
10. smoking cessation
11. to heighten (raise, increase, develop) awareness (knowledge)
12. secondary prevention
13. to identify a disease
14. early identification
15. to provide prompt treatment
16. to organize screening programmes
17. tertiary prevention
18. to reduce the effects of disease and disability
19. to minimize damage
20. to treat – to cure
21. disease-linked behaviours
22. chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
23. substantial threat to human health

II. Answer the questions

1. What is the main priority in primary care?
2. What are the benefits of preventive medicine?
3. What types of prevention are distinguished?
4. What do they deal with (are they concerned with)?
5. What are the main aspects of prevention at an individual level?
6. What types of behaviour are directly linked to disease? What evidence can you give?
7. What is one of the most substantial threats to human health in the 21-st century according to the WHO?
8. What negative health consequences may the misuse of alcohol result in?

III. Complete the sentences using the words below

1. General practitioners should put into practice the principle of ... medicine.
2. Prevention should have a high ... in primary care.
3. Preventative medicine gives great
4. ... of health includes lifestyle modification.
5. Secondary prevention is aimed at early ... of disease and the provision of ... treatment.
6. ... programmes can minimize the effect of disease.

benefits, screening, promotion, prompt, preventative, identification, priority