



## Editorial

### “Health” Care in Crisis

The United States health care system is in crisis. According to a recent Kaiser Family Foundation report, health care expenditures in 2003 totaled \$1.7 trillion, almost 700-percent greater than the \$246 billion spent in 1980, and over 15 percent of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product. Possibly, if you lived in some remote area of the world and were reading these statistics, you might think the United States must be the healthiest nation in the world, with all the money spent on “health.” However, those of us who have been on the front lines of health care know otherwise. Many of our patients are coming to us after years of being ground up in a system of care that emphasizes disease, not health.

About 61 percent of the U.S. population is overweight, while about one-third is obese. One contributor to these statistics is the fact that 38.3 percent of adult Americans live a completely sedentary lifestyle, getting no physical activity at all. Only about 20 percent of the population exercises regularly. Couple these lifestyle statistics with a prescription drug industry that promotes their new, ever-more-expensive, not-necessarily-more-effective drugs directly to the consumer and you get a population of American Idol-watching, sedentary individuals who are being programmed to believe it doesn’t matter if they exercise or what they eat or drink, because there will always be a drug out there that will fix ‘em.

Ultimately, we will need to start taking responsibility for our bodies, our minds, and our actions (or inactions) in order for us to crawl out of this crisis. We must change our daily habits to include a more nutrient-rich diet, regular physical exercise, and more nurturing, mentally healthy relationships. And for those areas of nutrition that are difficult to cover with diet alone, we need to supplement with proven, high-quality supplements. A case in point is fish oil. With a general uneasiness (and for some, actual distaste) regarding the purity and quality of the worldwide fish supply, many people are turning to fish oil supplements for their extremely well proven cardiovascular, anti-inflammatory, and brain health benefits. Many fish oil supplements are quite pure, with no detectable impurities, and are high enough in EPA and DHA to be clinically effective.

Unfortunately, this is another area where Big Pharma is trying to gain a foothold. Omacor<sup>®</sup> is a fish oil concentrate (90% omega-3 fatty acids providing 465 mg EPA and 375 mg DHA per capsule) that has FDA drug approval for lowering very high serum triglyceride levels. This FDA approval comes with a price – literally. A one-month supply (120 capsules) of Omacor costs the consumer \$175, which is about six times the cost of an equivalent non-prescription fish oil providing a similar amount of EPA and DHA. Because of its prescription status insurance companies will likely pay for it, which of course drives up health care expenditures. Does this make sense when an equivalent product can cost less than the patient’s prescription drug co-pay? I think not.

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