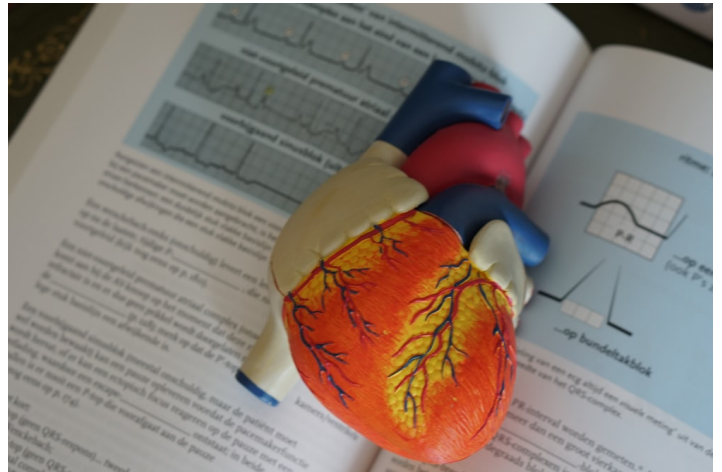




The Battle Against Hypertension

Those in the medical field are all too familiar with the devastation of hypertension, as every single day thousands are treated for this chronic illness. Unfortunately, not everyone knows they have this affliction until it's too late, meaning thousands are not receiving lifesaving, ongoing treatment for the condition. Due to its insidious nature, hypertension is known as a silent killer. While many cases are preventable, humans will be humans. There will always be stress, obesity, drinking, smoking, lack of sleep, and avoidance of exercise contributing to this deadly disease.



When looking at the societal impact of hypertension, it makes sense to focus on places where people spend much of their time, like with family and friends, the workplace, and the community. All three can play a role in improving hypertension statistics, and each has a stake in the outcome.

One in three people does not know their blood pressure is elevated, and therefore, hasn't been seeking treatment to control the issue. The cost of healthcare has been steadily rising for at least a generation, and if this trend continues, the increased expense will take a considerable bite out of the profits of companies throughout the US. Some analysts believe the amount could be as high as one-third of an organization's cash flow. Mitigation may be possible, if internal costs can be reduced or prices for goods and services increased, but the healthcare costs don't just threaten company profitability - they threaten jobs and the livelihoods of employees.

According to TCTMD, adults with hypertension have healthcare costs that are nearly \$2,000 more per year than their peers with normal blood pressure. When this statistic is projected across the entire US population, hypertension adds an estimated \$131 billion in healthcare spending each year. This adds up to more than 3% of total US healthcare expenditures.

The amount companies have to pay for their employees' healthcare coverage has been rising at nearly 10% per year. Over 75% of those costs are attributable to preventable chronic diseases, including heart disease.

A 2007 study published by the Milken Institute estimated the potential (perhaps even probable) future cost of the seven most prevalent chronic diseases (one of which is hypertension). Their estimate of \$1.3 trillion every year was staggering.

Obviously, healthy employees use fewer sick days and don't spend (or cost) as much in healthcare for chronic conditions. On the contrary, employees with high blood pressure are absent more often causing lost productivity. Leaders in business around the country are well aware of hypertension's impact on their workforce and workflow. Many companies offer programs to help their employees get healthy and reduce the risks that come with elevated blood pressure.

Addressing the burden of hypertension in both businesses and communities entails understanding the critical determinants that improve or worsen health. Having a conceptual framework showing how each factor contributes to a specific health issue can help identify potential interventions relevant to needs.



Agencies like the American Heart Association have reported that 80% of heart disease and stroke occurrences can be prevented. But how are the necessary lifestyle changes being supported? Here are a few ways the fight for better health is being tackled in the workplace and community.

- Family members, friends, and coworkers provide a support network, and directly impact a healthy lifestyle. When conforming to social norms of the group and expected roles of members, individuals may adopt health-promoting behaviors.
- At the community level, the attributes of a neighborhood can also promote or hinder health. A high density of fast food establishments in a given area, coupled with an environment less suitable for walking, surrounding a community of housing, are often associated with uncontrolled hypertension. The planned and built environment of an area may adversely affect people's lifestyle choices, depending on whether they have access to healthy food, mental health services, and physical activity resources.
- Employers are increasingly expanding their role in helping employees become healthier in order to make a sustainable impact on costly, preventable, lifestyle-related diseases. Using simple behavioral engagement approaches along with aligned incentives, they can better manage the expected demand for services. This tactic seems to make far more sense, when compared to the traditional practice of waiting for people to get sick and then managing the symptoms (often without really addressing the cause of the issue, or the issue itself).

IronRod Health is keenly aware of the wrath of hypertension, and is an advocate for educating the public about its prevention and management. We would love to hear what your company is doing in the fight against this silent (but oftentimes preventable) killer.