

Safeguarding Women is Our Devoir

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If someone asks me, as a healthcare provider (HCP), what's my wish for the new year 2024? I would say reducing the incidence of chronic diseases and decreasing the cost of healthcare, in other words, making the transition from disease treatment to prevention.

Preventive healthcare is a well-established program worldwide with varying application measures to prevent diseases. Disabilities and diseases, communicable or non-communicable, are influenced by many secondary risk factors including environmental and genetic factors, disease agents, and lifestyle choices. World Health Organization (WHO) recently reported that noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) kill 41 million people each year, equivalent to 74% of all deaths globally. As a result, WHO called for the development of an Implementation Roadmap from 2023 to 2030 to accelerate progress on preventing and controlling NCDs [1]. Despite the benefits of preventive care, it was found that only 8% of all United States adults received all recommended preventive healthcare [2].

As a gynecologist, I believe that women should be the core of preventative healthcare programs. Screening tests may be used for early detection and prevention, such as pap smears to screen for cervical cancer or mammograms to detect breast cancer. Other tests are used to definitively diagnose a suspected disease or condition, such as office endometrial biopsy to diagnose endometrial cancer or chorionic villus sampling to look for fetal chromosomal abnormalities. Moreover, vaccination is becoming an integral part of women's preventive health care. HPV vaccine has more than 95% efficacy in preventing cervical cancer and should be started any time after the age of 13 years [3]. Other vaccines are recommended during pregnancy to protect mothers and their newborns from diseases such as influenza, pertussis, hepatitis, and many other conditions as required. Hence, protecting women from various diseases relies on anticipatory actions that can be categorized as primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention measures. It is a dynamic process that begins with a primary background knowledge of disease prevention before a woman realizes that she needs to see a doctor, as illustrated in table 1. Secondary prevention materializes on the recommendation of a healthcare provider, while tertiary prevention is simply enrollment in a national or global recommendation program. There is also a timeline infographic for such preventative healthcare exhortations that are mandated according to age from childhood till post-menopause.

Preventing maternal death remains a global concern. Several measures have been developed to prevent maternal death starting with contraception. Getting pregnant can be a life-threatening condition if it is unintended or unadvisable due to comorbid conditions and hence contraception can be considered one of the most important preventative healthcare actions for women. Regular antenatal visits, supplemental minerals, and vitamins, recommended vaccines, venous thromboembolism prophylaxis, and feto-maternal screening schemes are well-documented in minimizing or abolishing maternal mortality and morbidity.

No.	Preventive Item	Recommended Approach
1	Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)	All sexually active women or those starting a new relationship should seek their HCPs to avoid STDs and to improve their sexual health.
2	Emotional Disturbances	Mental health is just as important as physical wellbeing. Certain preventive measures can be taken before a woman is diagnosed with a psychiatric condition. A woman should consult such professionals at the right time.
3	Cervical cancer	HPV vaccination and annual Pap tests are mandatory these days due to disease prevalence and the remarkable efficacy of such measures.
4	Breast cancer	Family history and age above 40 are the main reasons to take certain preventative means to protect a woman from such a deadly condition.
5	Colon cancer	It is one of the four common cancers among women. Many lifestyle risk factors can be modified to avoid colorectal cancer alongside screening colonoscopy after the age of 50.
6	Communicable infections	Vaccinations are the mainstay of preventing such conditions as seasonal influenza, COVID, encephalitis, pertussis, hepatitis, and others whether pregnant or not.
7	Osteoporosis	it is not limited to post-menopausal women. Osteoporosis has been seen in young women and different techniques are available to screen for it.
8	Obesity	Lifestyle modification, which includes healthy diet, exercise, and refraining from smoking, illicit drugs and alcohol does not only prevent obesity but protects women from all types of illnesses in general to live a quality life.
9	Maternal Mortality	Contraception. Regular antenatal visits. Supplemental minerals and vitamins. Recommended vaccines. Venous thromboembolism prophylaxis. Feto-maternal screening schemes.
10	Cardiovascular Risk	Checking blood pressure and screening for hyperlipidemia are more specific to predict such risk.

Table 1: Primary preventive healthcare issues for women.

Finally, I don't want to underestimate the multidisciplinary teamwork plans with clear communication between gynecologists and other health professionals to achieve this holistic approach and provide a sound and safe preventative healthcare model for women.

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