HOT TOPICS

Improving Health Care Quality for Women

The United States spends more money on health care than any other nation, yet ranks only 37th in the world in overall health system performance. Only half of our population receives needed preventive care. On the other hand, some services are not needed. One RAND study found that approximately 41% of the hysterectomies performed in the last ten years were clinically inappropriate or of uncertain value. The result? Unnecessary deaths and a huge waste of public and private dollars.

In September, the House passed a bill to establish an Office of Women’s Health within the Department of Health and Human Services, which will focus on women’s health issues. Key to improving health care for women is the ability to measure, monitor, and report on health care performance. RAND researchers have developed a comprehensive system for assessing quality of care, including new standards for women’s care. Implementing these standards nationwide would significantly improve the health care delivered to American women.

READ MORE: Evaluating the Quality of Care for Women

Quality Indicators for Women’s Health Care

Are Women in Shelters Healthier Than Those Living on the Streets?

Recent RAND studies of a large group of homeless women in Los Angeles found that shelters make a big difference in physical and mental health. Unsheltered women had over 3 times greater odds of poor physical health and over 12 times greater odds of poor mental health. Unsheltered women were also more likely to use alcohol and drugs, have multiple sexual partners, and be victims of violence—but were much less likely to use health care services. RAND’s studies suggest a critical need for more shelters and aggressive outreach programs for homeless women. Congress is considering the reauthorization of housing programs for low-income people, including several programs for the homeless.

READ MORE: Health Differences Between Sheltered and Unsheltered Homeless Women

Risk Factors for Violence Among Homeless Women

Higher Birthweights Mean Big Savings and a Better Chance of Survival

New technologies have improved the survival chances of very low birthweight babies—but at a high cost. A RAND study has found that public policies such as better prenatal care for women can be very cost-effective. Each normal birth that occurs instead of a low birthweight birth saves $59,700 in the first year of life. Merely moving the infant into a higher weight category would save thousands. An increase of 250 grams saves an average of $12,000–$16,000 in the first year; an increase of 500 grams saves $28,000. And the higher the birthweight, the better the chance of survival.

READ MORE: Preventing Very Low Birthweight Births

FORTHCOMING PROJECTS

- Age and gender differences in health care expenditures at the end of life

PROJECTS UNDER WAY

- Gender-based differences in care for depression

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