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TODAY'S 90'S; YESTERDAY'S 60'S

By Dr. Victor Sternberg

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In my practice this week, I had three 90+ year old patients, one of whom is still working at 96 years of age as a broadcaster. The second patient is a woman who drives from Peekskill to my office every 3 months to keep her remaining teeth healthy. And the third patient had broken a tooth and had to have it removed which was quickly replaced with an appliance so she could maintain her lovely smile.

As I've mentioned before, I now have 54 patients over 90 years of age. The opportunity to interact with and see the vitality of those entering their 10th decade is more than refreshing and inspirational.

In 1980 there were 15,000 Americans over 100 years old. Today there are 75,000 and growing.

To quote the great philosopher, Henny Youngman, "If I knew I was going to live so long, I would have taken better care of myself". His remarks are no longer humorous but real.

So here's to those who have made it to that 10th decade and all those on their way.

One thing is obvious however, that the idea of outliving your teeth is becoming a reality for many patients.

I have always emphasized prevention as the mantra for my practice and it still remains so.

Unfortunately however, teeth have a life span particularly when teeth have been treated early in life. One of the challenges of maintaining our patients with dentitions without dentures is so they can continue the pleasures of a nice smile, a good meal and a sense of self.

The challenges only increase as our population ages.

On another note, an interesting study was done recently which looked at the number of Americans who truly follow health guidelines. In examining an adult population, those who were within 10% of their ideal body weight, had a low body fat index, exercised rigorously at least 2.5-3 hours per week and ate what's considered a healthy diet, the study found only 2.7% of Americans fit that category.

We speak a lot about health, the issues of illness and the cost of healthcare as it skyrockets; these are constant subjects of our political debate.

While one side wants to repeal ObamaCare, the other side wants to provide healthcare for all.

I do not want to comment on the validity of these positions but I will say it now as I've said before, that unless we find a way to prevent disease and reduce its incidence, we are doomed to see the greater part of our gross national product spent on healthcare.

One final note, a recent study albeit an animal study, had a group of rodents perform different types of exercise and then looked at their brain cells. Interestingly enough, they found that the animals who performed aerobic types of exercises for a relatively long period of time developed an increased number of neurons or brain cells despite their age.

They concluded that somehow prolonged aerobic exercise seemed to prevent and in some respects improve brain function.

This is something to remember as we make that difficult decision about whether to exercise on a treadmill or take a long walk as opposed to subjecting ourselves to the vicissitudes of hours in front of the TV watching this insane political season unfold.

As always, I appreciate your comments.

Yours truly,
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