



CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES

ECONOMIC DOWNTURNS MAY ADVERSELY AFFECT HEALTH

Adverse economic conditions may result in mental stress that may diminish health, which can contribute to mental impairments and disability.

A forum was held by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation entitled “Beyond Health Care: New Directions to a Healthier America.” During the forum, panels discussed a commission report on early childhood interventions, accessing healthy food and creating healthy communities. Panelists were CEOs of philanthropic organizations, public policy experts on social health determinants, and business and labor leaders.

Summary

Health care is 15% of good health. There are many environmental social determinants that impact health, with each taking its toll. The association between economic conditions and adequate mental health and mental impairments rarely surfaces in health care public policy debates. There is evidence, however, that economic conditions associated with job loss have an adverse long-term effect on affected people and these effects generalize to family members. There has been a rise of emotional disturbance in school children, and their condition becomes worse as they transition from childhood to adolescence, and then to adulthood.

Disability Prevention Issues

Mental illness becomes a public health priority as youth transition from adolescence to adulthood because during this time, they are making difficult choices between healthy and unhealthy recreational behavior. However, social stigma can be attached to people and their families if a member is out of work because of perceived personal failure. Thus, there is need for risk assessment of vulnerable people to see if mental health interventions are appropriate and access to services are provided. Loss of employer health insurance may accompany job loss. Thus, acquiring needed mental health services by at-risk people through public health initiatives may prevent diminished mental impairment associated with disability.

Activity

A letter was written to a Federal health official, who raised the issue at the forum to comment on interventions for at-risk persons who may suffer diminished mental health associated with economic conditions.

Principle

The public health agenda, which includes interventions to prevent mental impairments, should consider vulnerable populations in adverse economic conditions as at-risk populations in health policy debates.