

Correspondence

Re: Estimating the Cardiovascular Disease Risk Reduction of a Quality Improvement Initiative in Primary Care: Findings from EvidenceNOW

To the Editor: The recent article by Lindner et al concluded, “This [cardiovascular disease] risk reduction would . . . avoid \$150 million in 90-day direct costs.”¹ It was grossly irresponsible of the authors to write this and for the editors to publish this.

This medical economic calculation did not apply the methodologies for cost-effectiveness evaluation and reporting that have been followed for over 25 years.² But we do not even need to understand the intricacies of these extensive guidelines to see the problem. The authors’ “spin” on this issue is identifiable through common sense: they included no upfront costs in their calculation.

They made no effort to include the intervention costs to achieve the preventive outcomes: no clinic visits, medications, lab tests, nothing. My back-of-the-envelope

calculation using modest assumptions on cost and utilization (see Table 1) shows that, at a minimum, \$3.73 billion must be spent to achieve the \$150 million “savings.”

Sloppily reported conclusions like this reinforce the fiction that preventive services save total health care costs. Our national academy, the American Academy of Family Physicians, reinforced this fiction recently when it submitted with the American Medical Association an *amici curiae* brief to the US Supreme Court that said, “. . . preventive care . . . saves money.”³

For the US to achieve a lower-cost, more equitable health care system, Americans must accept the realities of costs and outcomes that every health care system in every other developed country understands. Most often, an ounce of prevention costs a ton of money. Giving a platform to false statements with the imprimatur of scientific truth only digs our country further into a financial hole and delays even further the development of a sustainable national solution to our exorbitant health care costs.

Table 1. Calculations

Estimated costs for delivering preventive services from EvidenceNow

Assumptions from the Lindner article, Table 1

Population: 3,961,384

Timeframe: 10 years

Percent population only requiring smoking intervention	49.80%
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Percent population requiring smoking and blood pressure intervention	33.90%
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Percent population requiring smoking and cholesterol intervention	1.60%
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Percent population requiring aspirin, cholesterol, and smoking intervention	4.20%
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Percent population requiring aspirin, cholesterol, blood pressure, and smoking intervention	7.80%
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Cost assumptions

Clinic visit (99213 Medicare rate)	\$75	1 extra clinic visit per year to address the issue(s)
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Medications

Statin 1-year supply	\$16	Walmart price
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Blood pressure 1-year supply (2 meds)	\$32	Walmart price
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Verinicine, attempt per smoker	\$144	GoodRx price
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Aspirin	free	
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Labs

Basic metabolic profile	\$9	Medicare allowable
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Lipid panel	\$14	Medicare allowable
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Table 1. Continued

Intervention Costs				
Intervention Category	Number of Extra Uses Over 10 Years	Cost/Unit	Total Cost Per Capita	Total Absolute Cost (% Affected Times Total Population)
Smoking only				
Clinic visit	4	75	300	\$591,830,770
Medications	2	144	288	\$568,157,539
Smoking and blood pressure				
Clinic visit	10	75	750	\$1,007,181,882
Smoking medications	2	144	288	\$386,757,843
Blood pressure medications	10	32	320	\$429,730,936
Smoking and cholesterol				
Clinic visit	10	75	750	\$47,536,608
Smoking medications	2	144	288	\$18,254,057
Cholesterol medication	10	16	160	\$10,141,143
Smoking and cholesterol and aspirin				
Clinic visit	10	75	750	\$124,783,596
Smoking medications	2	144	288	\$47,916,901
Cholesterol medication	10	16	160	\$26,620,500
Aspirin		Free		
Smoking, cholesterol, blood pressure, and aspirin				
Clinic visit	10	75	750	\$231,740,964
Smoking medications	2	144	288	\$88,988,530
Cholesterol medication	10	16	160	\$49,438,072
Blood pressure medications	10	32	320	\$98,876,145
Aspirin		Free		
			Grand Total	\$3,727,955,486

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