

Health Bulletin



High Blood Pressure: A Worldwide Epidemic

(NAPSA)—High blood pressure affects an estimated 72 million Americans and more than 1 billion people worldwide. The good news is that if the condition is properly controlled, the incidence of major health problems—including stroke, heart attack and heart failure—can be greatly reduced.

Unfortunately, only half of Americans who are being treated for high blood pressure follow their treatment regimens. To help raise awareness of the risks of high blood pressure, as well as the benefits of proper care, many of the leading medical groups have signed on to a new report that details the seriousness of the condition.

The outcome of a research project conducted at the London School of Economics, the Karolinska Institute in Sweden, and the State University of New York Downstate Medical College, the report—"High Blood Pressure and Health Policy: Where We Are and Where We Need to Go Next"—acts as a global call to action examining the serious medical, economic and human health consequences of unchecked high blood pressure. According to the report, 70 percent of people with high blood pressure do not have the condition under control, putting them at greater risk for heart disease, damaged kidneys, blurred vision and even dementia.

The report predicts significantly higher rates of disability and death in the U.S. and around the world if efforts to prevent and manage hypertension are not improved. Uncontrolled high blood pressure increases the risk of cardiovascular events two- to threefold. Of special concern are the rising prevalence rates among older women, ethnic minorities



Rep. Donna Christensen (D-VI) got her blood pressure checked and called for a congressional hearing about high blood pressure after the release of the new global report.

and even teens. The latest data include the following:

- More American women have high blood pressure than men—39 million versus 33 million.
- The condition is two to three times more common in women taking oral contraceptives.
- African Americans are the most likely to develop high blood pressure and suffer from it earlier and more severely than any other racial or ethnic group. Compared with about 30 percent of whites, the overall rate among black adults is 41.4 percent and 44 percent among black women.

While high blood pressure is a "silent" condition, it causes damage with every beat of the heart. The report advocates more systematic health policies and new programs conducted by schools and community organizations to raise awareness of the lifestyle factors directly linked with high blood pressure: obesity, lack of physical activity, smoking, excessive sodium intake and overconsumption of alcohol. The report also advocates that all adults be regularly screened for high blood pressure when they visit their physician for other reasons.