

*Commentary:***Kaiser Permanente—Recognizing the Importance of Women**

Women's health stepped into the spotlight during the last decade of the 20th century, impacting the legislative, scientific, and political arenas. We applaud the efforts to change drive-by deliveries and mastectomies; the energy that has put breast cancer on the national agenda; the increased spending on women's health research and access; and the formation of Women's Health Offices at the National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Food and Drug Administration.¹⁻⁴

But now women's health is truly coming into its own, focusing on all aspects of female health as a woman moves through each stage of life—adolescence, reproductive years, midlife, and older adulthood. The health care industry is taking women's health seriously by developing strategies to tackle immunologic diseases such as HIV; osteoporosis; neurologic conditions, and psychologic problems, all prevalent among women^{5,6}; cardiovascular disease, thought to be the province of men and now known to manifest itself and respond to treatment differently in women; and pervasive, often life-

threatening issues such as domestic violence and sexual abuse, formerly considered nonmedical problems.

Kaiser Permanente (KP) has certainly put women's health on the map. We would be remiss if we underestimated the importance of women as the primary health care consumer and the economic power they wield as the key decision-makers in health care purchases for their families.⁷

For these reasons, we have developed task forces in several regions to change how we deliver care to women. We have conducted market research to determine what women want and value in health care.⁸⁻¹⁰ We have committed ourselves to improving health outcomes for women and easing their burden as the chief health care coordinator and caregiver for their families.⁷

KP's integrated health care model targeting population-based medicine,¹¹ emphasizing prevention, and relying on state-of-the-art information technology and robust research creates the framework for setting the standard in women's health and the delivery of health care to women and their families. ❖

References

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