Tourism Is Everybody’s Business, But ... 
Your Health Is Your Most Important Business

I often say that Tourism Is Everybody’s Business, and particularly in the areas where we operate Outrigger and OHANA hotels, that statement is absolutely true. Everybody needs to understand the role that Travel & Tourism plays in the local economy and work actively to keep it strong and vital.

From an individual perspective, however, personal health is of even greater importance. Without good health, one’s ability to work, care for family, and enjoy life is impaired or even lost. Everyone also needs to understand how the body works and the significant role that personal choices play in the development of many crippling diseases. Today, it has become absolutely clear that a healthy lifestyle, exercise, and diet can prevent the onset and/or advance of many diseases and conditions we once just attributed to “old age.”

Since the beginning of time, people have sought to prevent disease. Unfortunately, until very recently, good science was just not available to let us know what kind of preventive measures were actually effective. As a result, generations of human beings suffered through an endless assortment of “treatments” that included herbal remedies (some effective, others not), blood letting, rituals, prayers, animal sacrifices, and snake oils.

The general ineffectiveness of such measures caused physicians trained in the traditions of western medicine to focus more on treating than preventing disease. As advances in medical research, particularly in the 19th and especially the 20th centuries, illuminated far more clearly what works and what doesn’t, treatments became much more effective. Accordingly, treatment, not prevention, was the way I was trained at Harvard Medical School, whose mission statement said essentially that the school was to educate young men and women to heal the sick and relieve suffering. I cannot recall any training in prevention.

However, one of the things that has been found to really work is preventive care. It is still a relatively new concept. Today, thankfully, the link between lifestyle, diet, and exercise, and heart disease, cancer, dementia, stroke, diabetes, and osteoporosis is much better understood than even a few years ago. Health-care providers now have the knowledge to advise people on how to prevent conditions like these. They can prescribe changes in lifestyle, diet, and exercise at any stage of life to significantly reduce the chance of developing one of these major killers or disablers.

Unfortunately, other forces are at work. Health insurance plans are still focused primarily on treatment. They will pay to treat your heart attack, stroke or cancer, but until recently, they have generally offered only limited assistance to prevent such crippling events by helping you change your lifestyle or diet decades earlier.

Add to this the fact that doctors are busier than ever, working 12 to 14 hours a day for lower and lower pay. Many physicians have up to 40 scheduled appointments a day, leaving only about 10 minutes to see each patient. In those brief moments, there is little time left for in-depth consultation and advice about so many of the lifestyle, diet, and exercise issues that might lead to trouble later on.

That means that each of us has to do a lot more to preserve our own health.

- It starts with self-education about the benefits of improved lifestyle choices (for example, smoking), diet, and exercise habits.
• Then, there are a number of easy tests that can be done to see if you have significant risk factors for some of the major killer diseases.
• Finally, everyone has to dedicate him- or herself to making appropriate changes in what they eat, drink, and do to their bodies.

Professional assistance in this process can be helpful, but the greatest benefit will come to those who dedicate the time and effort needed to learn, investigate, and, if necessary, make changes in their daily lives.

This week, members of our ‘ohana who work on Oahu will have a wonderful opportunity to start this process by participating in the Annual Employee Health Fair (see announcement column right). The fair will be bigger and better than ever, offering many free tests and professional advice on a wide range of health topics. Representatives from our health insurance carriers, Kaiser Permanente and HMSA, will be there to answer questions about what they are doing to help you. Kaiser, in particular, has a great new program called "Thrive" that will help you make smart health choices.

I urge all Oahu-based members of our ‘ohana to attend the 2005 Annual Employee Health Fair. For those working in other locations, keep your eyes open for similar community-based health fairs and consult with your health-care provider and health-care insurance companies about what you can do to live more healthily and reduce the chance of being struck down by what we now know are preventable diseases.