Osteoporosis Care in Crisis

Fractures caused by osteoporosis are among the most significant challenges threatening the independence and quality of life for older Americans. Osteoporosis is a serious, debilitating, deadly, and costly disease that is under-recognized, under-diagnosed, and under-treated.

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a crisis in osteoporosis care: disease prevalence was on the rise. The Medicare payment cuts for DXA testing caused an exodus of experienced providers, and testing, diagnosis and treatment rates fell. Bone fracture rates, which had been declining for decades, began to increase.

In 2010, 54 of the 99 million Americans age 50+ were at risk of suffering from a fracture caused by osteoporosis. A 2021 Milliman report commissioned by the National Osteoporosis Foundation revealed that about 1.8 million Medicare beneficiaries suffered approximately 2.1 million osteoporotic fractures in 2016. Additional statistics show:

- In U.S. women age 55+, **bone fractures caused by osteoporosis lead to more hospitalizations and greater healthcare costs than heart attack, stroke, or breast cancer.**
- More women die each year from complications following hip fractures than from breast cancer.
- Half of women over the age of 50 will have a fracture caused by osteoporosis during their lifetime.
- The total annual expense of providing care for osteoporotic fractures among Medicare beneficiaries, including direct medical costs and indirect societal costs related to productivity losses and informal caregiving, has been estimated at $57 billion in 2018, with an expected increase to over $95 billion in 2040.

As our population continues to age, the threat of debilitating osteoporotic fractures to the quality of life of older Americans will continue to increase. In 2005, there were 2 million fractures annually and 300,000 hip fractures. That number of fractures is expected to increase to **3 million by 2025.** For the first time in decades, we’ve seen an increase in hip fractures indicating an alarming trend in osteoporosis care.

**Hip fractures are the most life-changing of all bone fractures:**

- 25% of women over the age of 50 who sustain a hip fracture actually die in the year following the fracture
- 50% never walk independently again
- 20% require permanent nursing home placement.

Unlike other diseases, where we are waiting to find an accurate screening test or cure, osteoporosis is a model for disease prevention with accurate, cost-effective diagnostic tools and inexpensive treatments that reduce fractures. **Bone density testing is more powerful in predicting fractures than cholesterol is in predicting myocardial infarction or blood pressure in predicting stroke.** Medicare beneficiaries who have a DXA bone density test have 35% fewer hip fractures and 22% fewer fragility fractures.

We have the tools to reduce these debilitating fractures with effective testing, diagnosis, and treatment. **Unfortunately, we are losing the war on osteoporosis by not using the valuable tools that we have.** The 72% Medicare DXA payment cut has wiped out a decade of prevention efforts resulting in fewer patients being screened and treated, fewer physicians providing DXA tests, and more patients suffering debilitating and unnecessary fractures.