

SUSTAINING PERSONAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING THROUGH HEALTH PROMOTION AND EDUCATION

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Abstract

This paper intends to look at the health promoting activities the individual should undertake to achieve a state of health and wellness. The ability to recognise that choices made by the person impacts on personal level of wellness and total wellbeing. This paper attempts to explain the problems that may arise from negative health behaviour and the ways by which every member of the society can feel good and function well.

Keywords: Health, Health promotion, Personal wellbeing, Cognitive assonance, social relationship

INTRODUCTION

Many health problems confronting the world today are moderated by action and inactions of the people. Health behaviour plays a key role in people's health and well being. Behavioural factors play major roles in each of the twelve leading causes of death including chronic diseases such as heart diseases, cancer and stroke which are the major causes of death globally (Abanobi and Ewuzie 2000; Glanz, 1997; Gochman, 1997). Every now and then, we see people smoke, take alcohol and indulge in indiscriminate social and sexual behaviour that could endanger their health and lead to untimely death and economic loss to the nation.

Abanobi and Ewuzie (2000) opined that health behaviour is an outcome of past and present influence. This also indicates that our decision to behave in a particular way is influenced by our needs, abilities, experience and environment. Also our emotion, belief can also influence

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behaviour. Clawson (2008) reported that people behave in certain ways based on the perception, belief, conclusion and from their social forces including cultural, political and economic factors which shapes our health behaviours.

The aim of health education is to develop in people, a sense of responsibility for health consciousness for themselves as individuals as members of families and as communities.

Concept of health (Good Health)

Good health is determined by the individual through the way he conducts his life, particularly his lifestyles and habits. This important factor (proper conduct of one's life) underscores prevention. To cure can be exceedingly costly. The opportunity to cure may not even arise. Hence, the emphasis elsewhere in the advanced countries of the world is health promotion. The way you manage your lifestyle, control stress, assemble your emotions and reduce your excess go a long way to reducing physical, mental, social and spiritual impairments (Ajala, 2005). Health is considerably more than the absence of a minor and major illness. It is partly biological status, a matter of how well the body's component parts are working or functioning. It is partly a consequence of behaviour, a reflection of our ability to coexist with other people. And it is partly a product of personal

and philosophical values, intimately tied to our concept of self- what we think we ought to be and what we think we really are (Ogunyanwo, 2004). Over the last several years, a growing understanding of the biological aspects of health has led to some exciting and startling technological advances in the battle against diseases. However, that we cannot reasonably expect future technological advances to be of such magnitude, the great breakthroughs of tomorrow will almost certainly come, instead, in the behavioural sphere, that is, in the greatly expanded understanding of why we behave as we do and more particularly, how we can go about changing behaviour that is harmful to our health.

Health is a topic of worldwide concern as it is inextricably linked with all aspects of daily living. The World Health Organization (WHO) constitution of 1948 defines health, as the state of complete physical, social and mental well being and not just the absence of disease or infirmity. The enjoyment of highest attainable standard of health is considered as one of the fundamental rights of every human being (WHO 2012).

Human beings always seek health care for ailments or diseases that for majority of times are preventable e.g. infective and parasitic diseases such as malaria, dysentery and

diarrhea diseases, measles, pneumonia, gonorrhoea, whooping cough, schistosomiasis, chicken pox, tuberculosis, meningitis, etc and even for some non-communicable diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, road traffic accidents and other conditions that lead to morbidity and mortality among the population have necessitated a renewed interest in health promotion, prevention and education.

Health Promotion

Health promotion is not just the responsibility of the health sector, but goes beyond healthy life-styles to well-being.

Health promotion is concerned with improving health by seeking to influence lifestyles, health services and, above all, environments (which are not limited to the physical environment but encompass as well the cultural and socioeconomic circumstances that substantially determine health status). There are several recognized definitions of health promotion, most of which embrace the tenets of health, community participation and individual empowerment. The most prominent, from the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, (WHO 1986) proposes a framework for action that sets out five priority areas: building healthy public policy; creating supportive environments; strengthening community action; developing personal skills;

and reorienting health services.

Health promotion has its roots in many different disciplines. Over time it incorporated several previously separate components, one of which was health education. Some authorities hold the view that health promotion comprises three overlapping components: health education, health protection and prevention.

These overlapping areas, as illustrated in Figure 1, are potentially substantial: health education, for example, includes educational efforts to influence lifestyles and for the individual to make informed choices that guard against ill-health as well as efforts to encourage participation in prevention services based on the knowledge of health he has internalized.

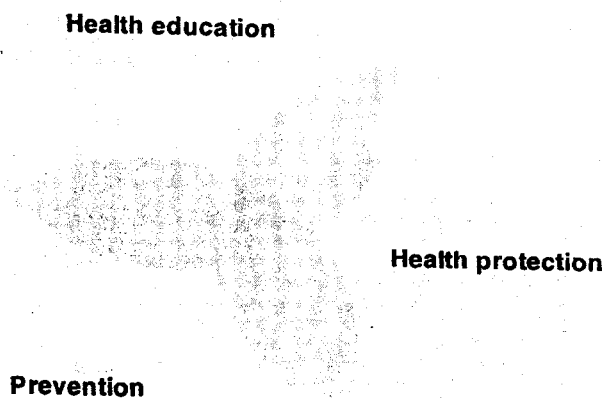


Figure 1. A model of health promotion

Source: (WHO, 2012)

Health protection addresses policies and regulations that are preventive in nature, such as fluoridation of water supplies to prevent dental caries. Health education aimed at health protection champions positive health protection measures among the public and policy-makers. The combined efforts of all three components stimulate a social environment that is conducive to the success of preventive health protection measures such as intensive lobbying for seat-belt legislation.

PERSONAL WELL-BEING

The concept of well-being comprises two main elements: feeling good and functioning well. Feelings of happiness, contentment, enjoyment, curiosity and engagement are characteristic of someone who has a positive experience of their life. Equally important for well-being is our functioning in the world. Experiencing positive relationships, having some control over one's life and having a sense of purpose are all important attributes of wellbeing (Hupper, 2008).

WAYS TO PERSONAL WELL-BEING

In order to effectively communicate the main influencers of well-being, the messages have been organised into five key actions, each offering examples of more specific behaviours that enhance well-being.

1. Social Relationship

Social relationships are critical for promoting well-being and for acting as a buffer against mental ill health. This seems to be the case for people across all ages. Social relationship is an important element of personal health and wellbeing. It relieves negative moods and emotions as the individual becomes happy with life and daily living.

Connect

This is one important way to relate with everyone in the world around you, with the people around you, with family, friends, colleagues and neighbours, at home, work, school or in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day at work and at home (Crompton and Lyonette 2007). Research has also found that happy people have stronger social relationships than less happy people (Diener and Seligman 2002). While the causality of this effect may be difficult to determine, studies from social capital research suggest that social

networks promote a sense of belonging and well-being (Morrow, 2001).

Feeling close to, and valued by, other people is a fundamental human need and one that contributes to functioning well in the world, the idea of connecting with people seems key to any set of actions. Social relationships are supportive, encouraging, and meaningful and are important for feelings of connectedness, familiarity and sense of self-worth associated with an individual's position in a community.

2. Regular Physical Activities

Physical activity is associated with a greater sense of well-being and lower rates of depression and anxiety across all age groups (Biddle and Ekkekakis, 2005). Regular exercises are a tonic for mental alertness, depression reduction and keeps obesity in check. It helps maintain muscle mass, promotes sleep and appetite and enhances general mobility.

Go for a walk or run, step outside, cycle, play a game. Garden, dance, exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity you enjoy; one that suits your level of mobility and fitness. However, in the case of children, at least, it has been argued that 'action is central to cognition'. Longitudinal studies provide some evidence to indicate that physical activity protects

against cognitive decline in later life and against the onset of depressive symptoms and anxiety (Kirkwood, Bond, May, McKeith & Teh, 2008).

It seems that an overall consensus has emerged about the importance of exercise for well-being. It seems to be essential for people at all ages, both as a mechanism for slowing age-related cognitive decline and for promoting well-being. Slower-paced activities, like walking, can also have the benefit of encouraging social interactions at the same time.

3. Cognitive Assonance

Heightened awareness enhances an individual's self understanding and allows an individual to make choices in alignment with his/her own values and intrinsic motivations. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, research into actions that aim to enhance well-being have similarly found that goals for behaviour change need to be aligned with personal values to be successful (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005)

For the individual that have developed a sense of heightened awareness about health matters, he/she is able to 'take notice' of parameters of health that affect personal health and well being. He is able to see a relationship between what he knows about health and the action

he takes (cognitive assonance) lasting behavioural change from positive health intervention/activity are somewhat internalised and owned by the individual.

Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment, whether you are on a train, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you. Learning from your environment, take notice of what might impinge your health and realistic (health) goals. Goal-directed behaviour has also been shown to have a positive impact on an individual's well-being, especially when the decision to engage in learning is concordant with intrinsic motivations and values.

4. Health Related Information for Action - A continuous learning process

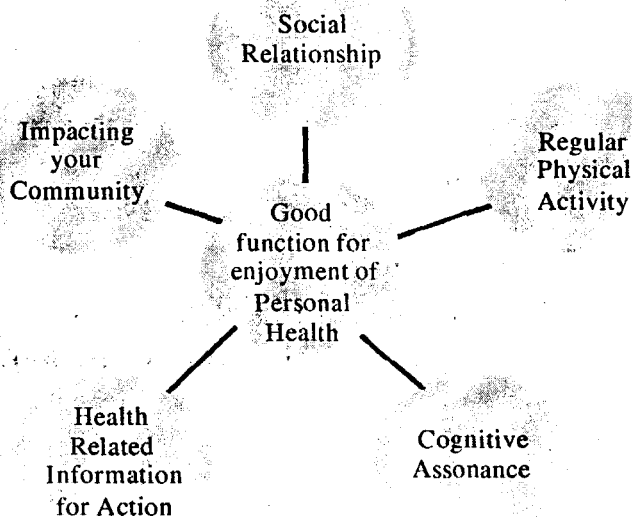
Notice that in the period around independent Nigeria in the 60's, the word hygiene was used to refer to the science of preserving health. The word is now obsolete, as new terminologies are in vogue - e.g. health education/promotion. Therefore as humans, we must learn new health behaviour and keep learning if we are to sustain and improve on present level of wellness. Then try something new, take on a different responsibility at work.

Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident, as well as being fun to do.

5. Impacting your Community

As a member of the community, it is not just enough to relate well with others, but it is important to give; of what you know so that others benefit especially when it comes to health matters - the axiom 'Charity begin at home'.

Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and will create connections with the people around you. Promote your Personal Health, wellbeing ultimately result in long but purposeful life.



Some Health Promotion Pointers to Personal Health and Wellbeing

- (i) Undertake positive path to live long and healthy (Think health and act health)
- (ii) Optimise health through prevention - (Maintain clean environment, prevent illness before it become serious, quit smoking and alcohol)

- (iii) Optimise health through tests and procedures - under take medical tests to screen for signs of ill health - test for stress, blood pressure etc.
- (iv) Appreciate nutritional choices for a healthy life - balance diet/ whole food
- (v) Understand the physiology of nutrition - how the body breaks down the component of food into manageable pieces (nutrients)
- (vi) Undertake movement and recreation (the benefits in moving the body, create exercise plan/regimen and follow through for positive physical activity)
- (vii) Employ mental health and stress reduction activities - through rest, relaxation, meditation and mindfulness
- (viii) Maintenance of mental age - with age, exercises and interact frequently with family and friends; stimulate the brain through learning,
- (ix) Make health choices in daily life - choices made everyday can affect ones health and life. - Rest and sleep adequately, stay well hydrated, control alcohol consumption especially during stress.
- (x) **Toast to healthy life - The health choices made by individuals are personal to life-long enjoyment or miserable health.**

Summary/Conclusion:

In the foregoing pages of this paper, some attempts have been made to examine the ways by which the individual can maintain and sustain personal health and wellbeing. Health is pathway to prosperity. Health is a daily and cumulative affair from 'womb to tomb' but it is also a purchasable kind of commodity and some of us are not as financially able as others.

However, we have a lot of smart people and they are perfectly capable of helping themselves, if given the knowledge. We would like to call this 'self-help medicine' and we think it would go a long way toward solving the nation's health crisis.

Conclusively, the challenge of attaining the optimal level of health for ourselves and our loved ones is a lifetime one. No one can do the job for us, nor should they. This is a responsibility each person should assume to the extent he is able with pride and conviction.

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