

To be in good health

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to review the government's role and responsibilities to educate and support society to achieve optimum health. Recommendations for collaborative and interdisciplinary support systems are suggested through a passive and pro-active health development strategy.

Design/methodology/approach – This is a commentary piece.

Findings – The case for Thailand is positive but further improvements can be made to achieve improved standards of health and educating society in order to achieve these goals.

Originality/value – Effective self-care is important to good health and is entirely dependent on people themselves, both individually and collectively. This aspect of health development should be firmly built into the national health care system.

Keywords Health, Good health

Paper type Commentary

Introduction

Regardless of income level, we all aspire to be in good health. This makes health a key driving force behind income generation. In order to meet the demand for good health, it is important to understand the important role played by reliable health services and health practitioners.

Society can be categorized into two groups: those who are already sick and in need of medical treatment and rehabilitation, and those who may already have pathological conditions, but do not yet exhibit clinical signs or symptoms of sickness.

For the first group, it is necessary to ensure effective treatment through national services. The objective of the second group is individually, to stay healthy with no need for extended medical support, and as a community, for governments to ensure the nation's good health by offering regular medical examinations, disease screening facilities and prompt treatment according to age and levels of vulnerability.

A government's main objective should be to reach optimum levels of health within the nation by supporting individuals who actively participate in the social and economic development of the nation. Governments should ensure that people have equal access to the best levels of health at a cost that the country can afford.

What is health?

The WHO Constitution defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”[1]. However, society is not devoid of disease, further determined by environmental and genetic factors.

Realizing the challenge posed by this goal, the WHO states in Article 1 of its Constitution that “the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health,” and “The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health, is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief economic or social condition”[2].



In an effort to reduce the gap between developed and developing countries and between groups of people in the same community, the World Health Assembly in 1977 passed a resolution, calling for Health for All (Peoples) by the year 2000[1, 3]. This is defined as “the level of health that can permit all people in the world to lead a socially and economically productive life”[3].

This statement accepts the present situation wherein physically and biologically, there is no one free from sickness. Achieving good health must be built on equity and social justice in health, and the foundation of a primary health care approach[4].

However, health is an individual responsibility and self-reliance at individual, family and community level is fundamental to achieving the described WHO targets.

Moreover, governments and health personnel should be relied upon to develop the knowledge and support required to educate and empower individuals to make the right health care choices. The sustainable development of a population's health is undoubtedly an important factor in a nation's progress toward peace, security and prosperity. Crucial to ensuring good health for all is the active engagement of all concerned stakeholders from a variety of sectors and disciplines including agriculture, animal husbandry, education, industry and the environment. Furthermore, technical and back-up support needs to be provided through full participation at district, sub-district and village levels to ensure equal accessibility to health services.

There are two main approaches to health development:

- (1) Passive strategy: places priority on nations in strengthening its infrastructure to support the sick and maintain the health of the people. This is achieved by constructing hospitals and medical facilities as well as training medical personnel so they can provide specialist services.

Thailand is fortunate to have a strong medical care infrastructure. Its universities are able to produce the required number of doctors and nurses needed to perform a range of services across the country.

However, the available care for treatment of the sick and rehabilitation of the disabled is inadequate due to sickness levels and an increasing aging population. Moreover, some are dissatisfied with the provision of current medical services and the lack of equal and easy access to quality levels of care in spite of the increasing burden on government resources:

- (2) Pro-active strategy is the process by which a government develops the ways and means of effectively delaying or ending sickness and disability through the implementation of national policy and programs that promote, maintain and protect the good health of the people. This is achieved by critically analyzing risks and devising approaches and measures for their effective control, reduction or prevention. Technological advancements, together with the increase in air-, water- and soil-borne disease risks have accelerated the rate of environmental and ecological degradation and deterioration. This, combined with the use of addictive substances and unsafe sexual practices, pose a threat to the advancement of a healthy society.

The government is responsible for developing an effective national health care policy and social infrastructure system. The allocation of funds accrued from taxation can be utilized to provide a health insurance system for all people[5, 6].

Since prevention is better than cure, it is wise to invest in a pro-active health strategy, emphasizing prevention and control of sickness and disability resulting in reduced medical care costs.

An important element of the pro-active strategy is to develop health promotion through education but also to develop methods of disease control and prevention. It is important to encourage individuals to stay healthy and play an active role in the development of the community.

It is also important to consider the country-specific social, cultural and economic determinants as well as country-specific health and disease risks. It is equally important to develop the spiritual dimension of a society by encouraging people to appreciate the ethical and moral value of a peaceful and united society.

The ultimate success of a pro-active public health strategy depends on the active participation and involvement of all sectors including education, agriculture, natural resources and environment and industry as well as information and communication technology.

In order to ensure the development of a healthy population, both passive and pro-active strategies must be carried out in parallel in an integrated and balanced manner.

Conclusions

Health is essentially an individual responsibility. Governments and qualified health personnel have an obligation to promote the importance of good health practices at family and community level through education and the provision of adequate infrastructure and support.

In order to avoid being a risk to society, individuals should modify their behavior and lifestyles. The miracle of the human body is still being studied, but we know that the body has a natural capacity to resist sickness if it is properly maintained and further enhanced through a holistic approach to health education.

In cases of sickness, individuals must be educated to the level of knowing and recognizing symptoms, but must also understand when it is appropriate to cure oneself or assess the type and level of assistance required. Unnecessary reliance on medical personnel that stretches resources beyond capacity should be avoided. Similarly, excessive consumption of drugs and medication, especially antibiotics, should be avoided.

Effective self-care is important to good health and is entirely dependent on people themselves, both individually and collectively. This aspect of health development should be firmly built into the national health care system.

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