

Health Education and its Importance

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It is good thing to think about your health than to worry about it. Most of us are naturally born healthy. Health is not something that we seek after by continually taking medicines and pills. This is also required but only when you find something has gone wrong with you and you need assistance to put it right. Science and medicine, now a day, can cure many diseases, defects and deformities, but prevention is still better than cure. Prevention of illness is achieved by living a natural healthy life with balanced diet, plenty of fresh air and vigorous exercise.

Prosperity, productivity and happiness depend a great deal on man's ability to maintain a reasonable degree health, fitness and strength. Life without health is a misery, a catastrophe and a state of almost non-existence. Illness, disease, deformity or malfunctioning of an organ is a debilitating condition which precipitates misery and one's downfall to death – an exact opposite of life. Unfortunately, most of us take health for granted and never realize its value until it gets badly damaged or almost lost often due to our neglect, ignorance, and ill-education. Health has recently been proclaimed as one of the fundamental rights of man. It is a social goal, which must be achieved for all without exception. The World Health Organization had set Health-for-All objective to be achieved by the year-2000. This sadly has not happened. As a result, “a socially and economically productive life for all citizens of the World”, continues to remain a distant dream.

Health Concept

For generations, health virtually meant freedom from disease, disability and death. Now science, research and man's experience have changed our concept of health by smashing various misconceptions about it. For some people essence of health is “presence of enough energy, vigour and vitality in the body to conduct daily activities”. Others speak of it as the “proper functioning of the various systems of the body”. Health today is being interpreted as a comprehensive area of human concern and interaction encompassing body, mind and spirit – their soundness, efficient functioning, growth and development in relation to biological, physical, social and cultural factors and man's genetic potential, besides freedom from and prevention of disease.

The salient features of the new health philosophy may be stated as under:-

- ❖ Health is fundamental human right, it should not be denied to anyone.
- ❖ Health is the essence of productive life and not the result of ever increasing expenditure on medical care.
- ❖ It is an integral part of human development.
- ❖ It is central to the quality of life.
- ❖ Health is a responsibility of the individual, state, community and the nation.
- ❖ Health – its development and maintenance – is a major social investment.
- ❖ It is a world-wide social objective.

Health Education Objectives

Health education is that phase of life-experience in which a person educates himself about health – its development and maintenance – in its holistic form in order to ensure his continued wellbeing. It is a lifelong process and virtually commences with the mother teaching her baby regular ‘potty’ habits and continues with the child being taught the regular and adequate sleeping, eating and drinking habits. All these health habits learnt in early childhood help to build strong and healthy bodies later in life. In childhood, parents take care of children’s health and initiate them into health habits but as they grow up, they learn health practices by self-experience and instruction at school.

Inherent in this comprehensive definition of health education are three major objectives:-

- 1) To spread awareness among people about the methods and means of prevention of disease and promotion of health.
- 2) To motivate people to practice principles of health and develop healthy habits among them.
- 3) To press into service the health academia to conduct professional training and research so as to achieve the goals of health education.

Under first objective people are expected to acquire knowledge both through self-effort and structured instruction as at school about maxims and principles of health, causes, cures and preventive measures of various diseases, health promoting factors and general human anatomy and physiology.

Under second objective health education must provide such learning experiences to the people as favourably influence their life-styles, habits, attitudes and ethics relating to their own health and that of others around them.

Under third objective research and training which constitute the objective of health education expand the horizons of knowledge about health in all its dimensions and keep people abreast of the latest techniques of fighting the menace of diseases, environmental hazards, pollution and ecological degradation and how to check it.

In school setting health education addresses itself incidentally to three major objectives more or less similar in nature to those explained above:

- a) Health instruction
- b) Health supervision
- c) Health environment

Importance of Health Education

Health education is a strong motivating force for all kinds of people to have a critical look at their life-style and make efforts to change all those habits and behaviours that impinge upon one’s health and endanger life. Nothing worthwhile can be achieved in the area of individual, community and national health until and unless people get inspired to take care of their surroundings and environment and go all out to eradicate factors and check forces detrimental to health e.g. unclean water and beverages, diverse pollution, open-air defecation, alcohol consumption, drug addiction, smoking, physical inactivity etc. In matters of health and personal hygiene persuasion and motivation work wonders, neither coercion nor compulsion as in case of family planning in Kerala.

Without health education no one can improve their social and economic standard. Much of the poverty and backwardness in our country is due to absence of proper education about personal hygiene and cleanliness especially in villages and among

women. A healthy person is an asset because he is physically strong and is capable of higher productivity. So, he lives happily. Conversely, an unhealthy person is a curse on himself and a huge liability on others, he only demands – attention, care, medicine, help, time etc. Proper health education can change this murky scenario for the better.

The aim of providing a due recognition and room to health education in the school curricula means to –

- Create health-awareness among students
- Instill health habits among them right from the beginning
- Make students participate in national development programme
- Use student-power in keeping the environment free of all pollution
- Make students an instrument of health knowledge for adults and the backward
- Eradicate religious and social taboos about health through educational process
- Bring radical change in the attitudes and habits of the people through public relations

Principles of Health Education

Important principles of health education may be enumerated as under:-

1. No health effort can succeed unless people realize the worth of that effort and give it a whole-hearted support. We often do things better in which we are interested. Therefore, interest is a big motivating force which is developed in an individual or group by persuasion, inspiration and persistence. Slogans like “Be Fit” or “Keep Healthy” or “Run for Health” sound hollow when people do not imbibe the spirit underlying them and do likewise. Only sustained motivation can help people take care of their health.
2. Necessity is the mother of invention, no doubt. We hardly do anything unless there is a felt-need to do so. Let health and health education focus on what the need of the individual and that of the hour is. A need-based health education shall have ready acceptance and voluntary following. Remember, all are not conscious of their health problems and needs, nor all have access to preventive and remedial measure. Importantly, people should be aware of their health needs that vary from people to people, community to community and locality to locality.
3. As in education, so in health education, proceed from known to unknown, concrete to abstract and simple to complex. Start with what people already know and gradually introduce what they ought to know. Health education is an essentially educational process. Let people understand things and practice them as they get aware about them. Every idea should be within intellectual grasp of the people. Success is ensured and it comes quickly when instruction is within people’s intellectual grasp.
4. Use the communication media – especially language – that best suit people. Unfamiliar and difficult-to-follow language makes a mess of the whole thing. Simple principles of science or health should be explained in simple, understandable and easy-to-grasp language. The use of vernacular fetches good response and results.
5. Health effort should be reinforced and followed up until success in sight. Health education symbolizes practices principles. Children at home and students at school must be made to observe regularity and punctuality standards in their personal hygiene (for example, they brush their teeth at least twice a day, take bath, comb

hair etc.). Regular inspection of children's habits of eating, drinking, sleeping, playing etc. bears sweeter fruit constant reminder is necessary in forming habits. Behaviours are reinforced and established by their consequences.

6. Health is a basis for survival, it is a requirement for work-efficiency and productivity. Without proper understanding of its principles, standards of health are difficult to maintain. Motivation for health knowledge, awareness and education, like good thoughts, must come from all corners. Every single person needs to realize the worth and value of being healthy and fit. Tangible incentives like money are no substitute for good health education.
7. In health matters, learning-by-doing should be the guiding principle. Healthy habits are a learning phenomenon. A Chinese proverb illustrates this point wonderfully "If I hear, I forget, if I see, I remember, If I do, I know". Practicing means knowing and knowing must lead to learning perfectly. No blackboard operation can impart any practical knowledge about health. Only with participation and practice can people acquire health and healthy habits.
8. Both health education and health practices must draw their substance from the scientific facts, not hearsay, witchcraft, tradition or quackery. Science and tradition are opposed to each other, but science has with it light of the truth, it should not be sacrificed for tradition.
9. Make health education media attractive, effective and result-oriented. Often the subjects (people) are termed as soil, health facts (knowledge, education) as seeds and communication media (ways, means, methods, techniques) as cultivator. All the three fall on one continuum at successive points. All good ideas and good actions require good communication media to be transmitted far and wide.
10. Health education without human relationship is a body without soul. That human relationship is at the heart of all education needs no elaboration. The health educator must act as a friend, philosopher and guide to all in comes in contact with.
11. Health education without competent leadership is like a headless horseman who knows no direction. A headman in a village, a teacher at a school and a social worker in society play a key role in educating people about health. A leader wields authority over his followers on account of his conviction and character. His word is a God-word for them. Community leadership and health leadership must be hand in glove with each other.

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