

Health Promotion and the Community Pharmacist

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What is Health Promotion?

Health is a precondition for well-being and quality of life. It is also a basic human right and is essential for social and economic development. Increasingly, health promotion is being recognised as an essential element of health development. It is a process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health whether it is physical, mental, emotional or spiritual.

The Jakarta Declaration (1997) states that health promotion, through investment and action, has a marked impact on the determinants of health so as to create the greatest health gain for people, to contribute significantly to the reduction of inequities in health, to further human rights, and to build social capital.

The ultimate goal is to increase health expectancy, and to narrow the gap in health expectancy between countries and groups.

Health Promotion makes a Difference

Research and case studies from around the world provide convincing evidence that health promotion is effective. Health promotion strategies can change lifestyles and have an impact on the social, economic and environmental conditions that determine health. It is nowadays no longer sufficient to talk of health education but to invest in health promotion. It is a practical approach to achieving greater equity in health.

Health promotion is carried out by and with people, not on or to people. It improves both the ability of individual to take action, and the capacity of groups, organisations or communities to influence the determinants of health. In this way, health promotion increases community capacity and empowers individuals.

The Pharmacy as a Setting for Health Promotion

All health professionals are in an opportune position to enable their

clients to make healthier choices and the pharmacist is no exception. Pharmacists are increasingly ready to provide health advice. Pharmacists mostly deal with customers that are not ill. They may be shopping for toiletries or picking up a prescription for someone else. But this visit presents an opportunity to provide customers with healthier information.

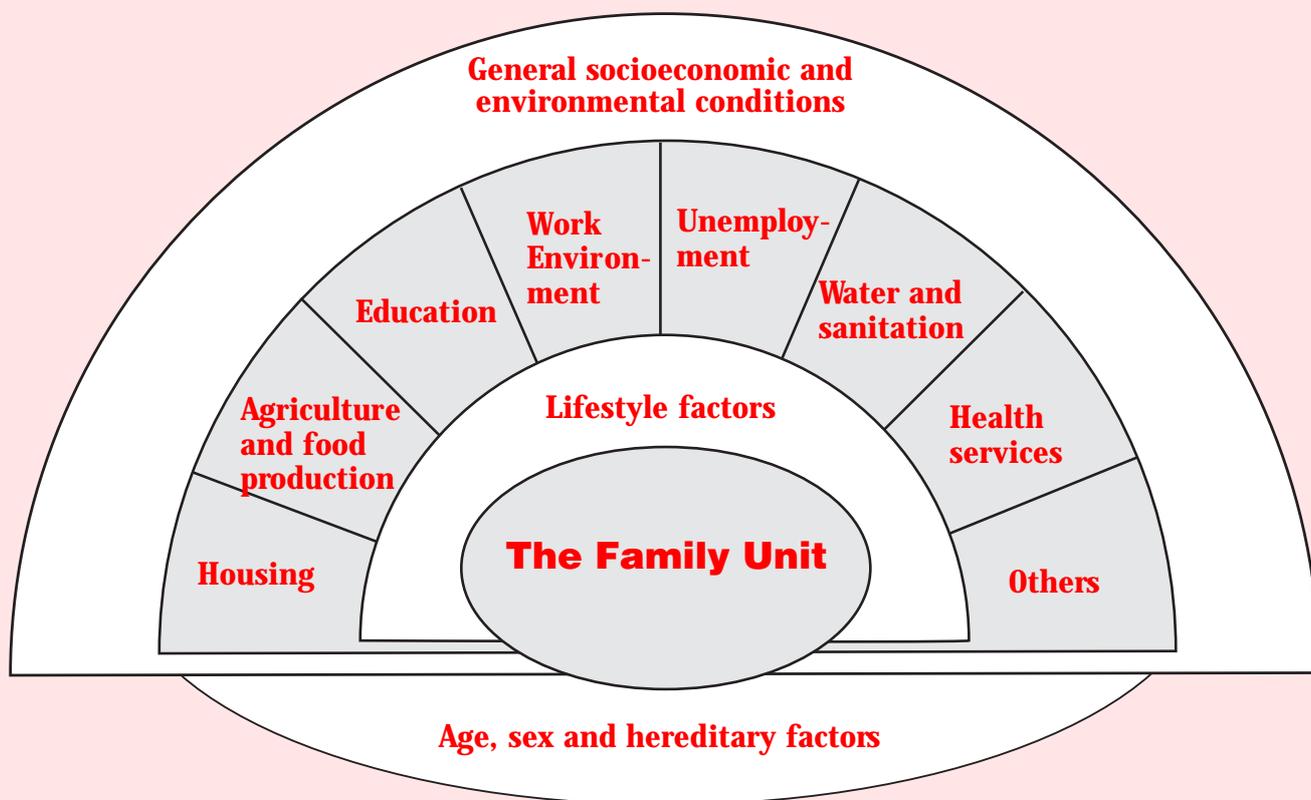
In the UK the Pharmacy Healthcare Scheme (PHS), an agency that promotes health education in the pharmacy setting, states that the accessibility of the pharmacist in the community and the potential contact for those not visiting the GP make the pharmacist a highly valued member of the healthcare team.

All pharmacists should be involved in encouraging healthy behaviour. This can be done by setting aside space for health promotion literature, responding to the requests for advice and providing simple health promotion advice when giving out prescriptions, making sales and responding to symptoms. It is also worthwhile to seek opportunities to promote health in the pharmacy e.g. prohibition of smoking; encouraging breast-feeding on-site; advocating a non-medicinal approach when applicable to problems easily solved by life-style changes. In this way pharmacists may identify the stage of change the person is at and offer advice and ongoing support. This is most appropriate in the case of smokers seeking advice on cessation techniques as well as in the management of overweight individuals. Both scenarios are very relevant to the local scene and involve stages of behaviour change in a person's lifestyle.

The EU also stresses that pharmacists may get involved in advising customers on appropriate off-the-self medicine. Pharmacists may also provide advice on when it would be appropriate to seek the doctor's advice. Other issues concern the side-effects and contra-indications of prescribed medications and how to take these medications effectively. They also provide advice on when it would be appropriate to seek the doctor's advice.

By providing health promotion, the role of the pharmacist is broadened further and adds to the approach of

Figure 1 Main Determinants of Health



Source: Dahlgren, G. & Whitehead, M. *Policies and strategies to promote social equity in health*. Stockholm, Institute for Future Studies, 1991.

holistic health as defined in the pharmacy setting.

Health Promotion at Undergraduate Level

It is therefore crucial that health promotion becomes part of the undergraduate pharmacy curriculum. This should be a natural development in the preparation of students leading to this profession. Future pharmacists need to understand the principles of health promotion if they are to be in line with other health professions where this training is already being done. Such training would facilitate pharmacists in becoming advocates of health promotion.

In the future all health professions, including the medical one, will require a good foundation of health promotion if they are to deliver good quality care. The World Health Organisation is continually stressing that developed countries need to build multisectoral strategies to promote health in all settings whether in the community,

school, hospitals, pharmacies and workplaces.

Conclusions

The Health Promotion Department in Malta keeps the community pharmacist updated on recent campaigns and publications available to the public through mail shots. The pharmacist however, also needs to act provocatively to remain abreast on such issues and to encourage the community it serves in choosing healthier lifestyles by learning skills that enable them to

take control of their health.

Through alliance building with the community pharmacist, it is hoped that the future initiatives by the Health Promotion Department will find a firm standing in our towns and villages. ★

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