

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE HEALTH SYSTEM TO THE PROMOTION OF PHYSICAL AND SPORTS ACTIVITY

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Review paper

Abstract

Scientific research has long highlighted that regular physical activity promotes a healthy lifestyle, with high benefits on the person's general health, and is one of the elements that contribute to the prevention of multiple diseases. These considerations indicate that the promotion of physical activity affects the individual and the community, and it is therefore necessary to design interventions aimed at the individual, the group and the community. Ensuring conditions that facilitate motor activity and access to sports activities is a fundamental objective, both for public health professionals and for those involved in protecting and guaranteeing the quality of life of the community as a whole. The public health authority must ensure health protection also by encouraging the spread of motor activity as an effective means of promoting, maintaining and restoring health. In this scenario, Sports Medicine plays an important role as the promotion of physical activity has the aim of fostering the psychophysical well-being of citizens, resulting in the reduction of costs for the National Health Service (NHS).

Key words: Sport; Sports Medicine; National Health Service.

Introduction

Scientific research has long highlighted that regular physical activity promotes a healthy lifestyle, with high benefits on the person's general health, and is one of the elements that contribute to the prevention of multiple diseases. Regular physical activity helps improve the quality of life thanks to its positive effects on both health and personal satisfaction. Physical activity helps decrease blood pressure, controls blood sugar levels, regulates blood cholesterol, promotes the prevention of metabolic, cardiovascular and neoplastic diseases, arthrosis and reduces excess adipose tissue. It also acts positively on the symptoms of anxiety, stress, depression and loneliness, and brings benefits to the muscular and skeletal system. Finally, motor activity limits the direct and indirect costs of physical inactivity, considered an important risk factor for global mortality.

These considerations indicate that the promotion of physical activity affects the individual and the community, and it is therefore necessary to design interventions aimed at the individual, the group and the community. Ensuring conditions that facilitate motor activity and access to sports activities is an objective of paramount importance for public health professionals, and for those involved in protecting and guaranteeing the quality of life of the community as a whole. The public health authority must ensure health protection also by encouraging the spread of motor activity as an effective means of promoting, maintaining and restoring health. In this scenario, Sports Medicine plays an important role in primary prevention (promoting healthy lifestyles), secondary prevention (early diagnosis of diseases) and tertiary prevention (prevention of complications through physical activity in people suffering from chronic and degenerative diseases).

Consequently, Sport and Sports Medicine have a very important function for the protection of individual and community health.

International Policies

The Ottawa Charter, published in 1986 by the World Health Organisation, defines health promotion as the process by which individuals can improve their health and exercise greater control over it.

In order to achieve a state of physical, mental and social well-being, the individual or the group must be able to recognize and realize their aspirations, satisfy their needs, change their environment or adapt to it.

Health promotion is closely linked to public policies aimed at creating favorable environments, empowering community action, developing personal skills, and reorienting health services.

One of the tasks of the Health System operators is to train and empower the individual to maintain his or her own state of health. In order to promote a suitable lifestyle among the population, the role of sports medicine is fundamental.

The World Health Organization has presented many documents and guidelines to direct national policies towards the promotion of physical activity.

In the Information Note issued by the WHO on Physical Activity, we can read that "WHO defines physical activity as any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure – including activities undertaken while

working, playing, carrying out household chores, travelling, and engaging in recreational pursuits.

The term "physical activity" should not be confused with "exercise", which is a subcategory of physical activity that is planned, structured, repetitive, and aims to improve or maintain one or more components of physical fitness. Beyond exercise, any other physical activity that is done during leisure time, for transport to get to and from places, or as part of a person's work, has a health benefit. Further, both moderate- and vigorous-intensity physical activity improve health.

The intensity of different forms of physical activity varies between people. WHO recommends that:

- *Children and adolescents: Should do at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous-intensity physical activity daily;*
- *Adults aged 18 on: Should do at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity throughout the week".*

As for the benefits of physical activity, the information note also states "Regular physical activity of moderate intensity – such as walking, cycling, or doing sports – has significant benefits for health. At all ages, the benefits of being physically active outweigh potential harm, for example through accidents. Some physical activity is better than doing none. By becoming more active throughout the day in relatively simple ways, people can quite easily achieve the recommended activity levels. Regular and adequate levels of physical activity:

- *improve muscular and cardiorespiratory fitness;*
- *improve bone and functional health;*
- *reduce the risk of hypertension, coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes, various types of cancer (including breast cancer and colon cancer), and depression;*
- *reduce the risk of falls as well as hip or vertebral fractures; and*
- *are fundamental to energy balance and weight control."*

Scientific research has long highlighted that regular physical activity promotes a healthy lifestyle, with high benefits for the person's overall health. Regular physical activity helps improve the quality of life as it has a positive effect on both health state and on personal satisfaction. As already highlighted, it helps decrease blood pressure, controls blood sugar levels, regulates blood cholesterol, promotes the prevention of metabolic, cardiovascular and neoplastic diseases, arthrosis and reduces excess adipose tissue. In addition to this, it has a positive effect on the symptoms of anxiety, stress, depression and loneliness, and brings benefits to the muscular and skeletal system. Physical exercise does not have to be necessarily intense, as specified by the World

Health Organization, which defines physical activity as "any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure". To be physically active, daily life movements such as walking, dancing, cycling and doing housework are suitable. In this regard, in 2010, the WHO presented the "*Global recommendations on Physical activity for Health*", in which it explains the levels of physical activity recommended for health, making a distinction between three age groups.

Health systems have the potential to play an important role in health promotion so as to enhance people's adoption of a healthy lifestyle, by promoting physical activity in health and non-health contexts, such as during everyday activities. At the 65th meeting of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe, the 53 Member States adopted the new Physical Activity Strategy for the WHO European Region 2016-2025.

The Physical Activity Strategy aims to push governments and stakeholders to work towards increasing the level of physical activity among all citizens of the European Region by:

- promoting physical activity;
- reducing sedentary behavior;
- creating favorable conditions for physical activity through engaging and safe built environments, accessible public spaces and infrastructure;
- ensuring equal opportunities for physical activity regardless of gender, age, income, education, ethnicity or disability;
- removing barriers to and facilitating physical activity.

The strategy sets out a series of priority objectives, including Objective 3.3 – Integrate physical activity into prevention, treatment and rehabilitation. Member States should work towards making the promotion of physical activity by health professionals the norm. Early identification, counseling and referral at the primary care level should be integrated into standard practice and should respond to the different needs of patients. For the general population, a simple assessment of the level of physical activity could be integrated into the ongoing risk factor assessment, followed by brief advice, if required, about recommended levels. For patients requiring more support, the counseling may take the form of an intervention using motivational techniques and goal setting, with referral to specialists and other health and allied professionals, where necessary.

While the promotion of physical activity should be seen as a core competence for all primary health-care professionals, governments could also consider ways to continuously provide incentives for its full integration into daily practice. Physical activity programs or sports classes and physical activity-based prevention or rehabilitation offers may be considered, according to national circumstances, for the purpose of reimbursement by health insurance companies or national health systems when and where appropriate, with clear guidance for health professionals.

Italian Policies

In Italy, the 2003-2005 National Health Plan (NHP), as well as the following ones issued, recognizes physical activity as essential to the adoption of a healthy lifestyle, and emphasizes the protection role of regular physical exercise against cardio and cerebrovascular diseases, as well as against metabolic and osteoarticular diseases.

The NHP has been supplemented by the National Prevention Plans (NPP), and the current one is linked to the guidelines contained in the main documents of the WHO European Region: Action Plan for implementation of the European Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases 2012-2016, and Health 2020: the European policy for health and well-being.

The NPP provides for health promotion actions to promote the sustainability of the National Health Service (NHS). These actions aim at the empowerment and resilience of people and communities, and their main aspects are: - affirming the crucial role of health promotion and prevention as factors for the development of society; - adopting a public health approach that guarantees equity and the fight against inequalities; - basing health prevention, promotion and protection interventions on the best evidence of effectiveness. The Plan has defined a few macro objectives with high strategic value, which can be pursued by all Regions.

The Regional Prevention Plans (RPPs) are intended to set objectives, strategies and actions to be taken for health promotion and disease prevention, based on each regional context. Through these Plans it is possible to develop actions that, following guidelines provided by the NPP, contain programs aimed at promoting physical activity.

Health promotion and sports medicine

In 2015, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimated that health costs were growing so rapidly as to become unsustainable by 2050. The OECD has supported a different view of health systems, with policies aimed at developing the ability of people to adopt a more active role in relation to their own health (OECD, 2015). The Italian White Paper on Sport, proposed in December 2012, highlights the effect of motor and sports activities on national health costs. This document underlines how physical activity generates direct benefits on citizens' health and on national health costs.

It is necessary that Sports Medicine activities are enhanced so as to contribute to the protection and promotion of public health, not only through the health protection of competitive and non-competitive sports activities, but also through the assumption of an important role in the promotion of motor activity throughout the population; scientific evidence shows the effectiveness of physical

activity in the prevention and treatment of many chronic diseases.

Over the years, sports medicine has gradually changed from a medicine with a "certifying" function to a complex specialized one, included in the essential healthcare levels and with specific interest in the field of prevention, specialized assistance and hospital care (Noventa, 2007).

Sports Medicine specialists intervene in health, motor and sports education programs, with the aim of promoting the culture of physical and sports activity, enhancing education on movement and the positive use of leisure time, encouraging the individual's overall growth and development and the acquisition of healthy lifestyles. This context also includes the education to a "healthy" sport through the promotion of a balanced and adequate diet, avoiding the improper use of ergogenic and especially doping substances in accordance with the ministerial project "Gaining Health" (the new role of sport medicine, review of the protocols of suitability for competitive and non-competitive sports activities, Health Commission of July 10, 2013).

Sports medicine has a wide scope, and if we link this to the multiplicity of users, we can easily understand the social role of this specialty, which is dedicated to large sections of the population. For this reason, the National Health Service, by means of this specialty, will have to promote greater awareness of the benefits resulting from increased motor and sports practice, both among other health professionals and among the general population. Sports Medicine promotes also the culture of physical and sports activity, encourages the development of movement education and supports the individual's holistic development.

Conclusion

Among the goals of Sports Medicine there is the protection of the health status of each individual and of the community. Regular physical activity helps improve life quality, having a positive effect on both health and personal satisfaction. As already highlighted, it helps decrease blood pressure, controls blood sugar levels, regulates blood cholesterol, promotes the prevention of metabolic, cardiovascular and neoplastic diseases, arthrosis and reduces excess adipose tissue.

The objectives of disease prevention achieved through the development of physical efficiency, establish a significant relationship between the activity itself and medicine. The relationship between physical- sports activity and Sports Medicine plays a very important role in preserving the health status of the individual and of the community.

As also underlined in the book "Movimento, sport e salute: l'importanza delle politiche di promozione dell'attività fisica e le ricadute sulla collettività" (Istisan report 18/9; produced by the Italian

National Institute of Health, the Italian Ministry of Health and the Italian National Olympic Committee), the fostering of physical activity aims

to promote the citizens' psychophysical well-being, resulting in the reduction of the costs for the National Health Service (NHS).

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