

Presentation at the 12th annual public health forum 19th April- 22nd April 2004
at The Brighton Centre
Sustaining Public Health in a Changing World: Vision to Action

WHAT IS HEALTH?

If we are to discuss health provision, promotion and enhancement, we ought at least agree on the definition of health. The WHO in 1958 defined it as the total social, psychological and personal well-being. However the West still focusses on the negative concepts of mortality and disease.[1](#)

The aetiology of health was researched in depth by Dr Scott Williamson, who regarded health as a biological entity capable of existing as the natural state where environmental conditions were resonant and in mutual relationship with the organism.[2](#)

The socio-economic aspects of health are studied by Ichiro Kawachi, Kennerdy & R. Wilkinson.[3](#)

A Conference was held in 1991 at the Kings Fund Centre on Total Participation, Total Health, which tried to understand the validity of The Peckham Experiment in today's world.[4](#)

Gesundheit! expands the concept of health and happiness and points a way to a new era in health care and medical practice, not dominated by technology and money.[5](#)

Aaron Antonovsky developed the idea that our health is dependent on experiencing the world we live in with a sense of comprehensibility, a sense of manageability and a sense of meaningfulness.[6](#)

Lord Horder suggested health is more than a soundness of body and mind. We can't define health in a negative way, by saying it is a freedom from disease. Because health isn't a negative thing; it is positive...As a matter of fact it is not an exact balance. There is a little something to spare, of which the healthy man is quite conscious. This is what leads him to say: ³It's good to be alive²⁷

The new concept of health fits a holistic model of man and the universe, it demands that we have a larger perspective than current thinking can deal with, perhaps Rudolf Steiner gave us some of the vision we now need.²

It has therefore (now) become actually impossible to investigate the true nature of health and disease²⁸

THE PARADIGM SHIFT

The distinction between curing and healing is discussed by Dr Robin Kelly.[9](#)

Fritjof Capra has expressed this paradigm shift in his work The Web of Life, The Turning Point and The Concept of Paradigm [10](#) [11](#)

Medical Nemesis written in 1977 by Ivan Illich was prophetic but presented a viewpoint that established medical leaders didn't want to hear.[12](#)

Living Proof by M Gearin-Tosh gives an insight into the problems of making a paradigm shift for the patient.[13](#)

Now is the time to reopen our study of the healing process and alter the way medicine approaches it, to turn our attention from disease and death to health and life. Bernie Siegel.[14](#)

That the current Cartesian mechanistic validation of the New Paradigm will never be found is self evident.

Thom Hartmann suggests we don't need a new paradigm but a return to the old paradigm which served us well for 100,000 years! [15](#)

THE RESOURCE SHIFT

David Hunter asks ³How can we turn around the health policy tanker, so it actually leads to better health instead of pushing on in search of better ways of dealing with illness²¹⁵

Throwing more money at medical healthcare does not necessarily mean better health. [16](#)

Wennberg JE.. (We are seeing diminishing returns on this investment). In Tanzania, with a tiny extra infusion of cash (only 80 cents per person, per year), they redirected money towards the diseases that caused the most suffering but were cheapest to treat. Infant mortality then fell by an amazing 28% in a single year.[17](#)

This shift need not jeopardise funding to current medical resources.

What would be needed would be differential growth for each sector, the minuscule funding to self-help and help for those caring for relatives or partners at home would grow by perhaps 20% pa, funding of

CAM and other supportive care by 15% pa, community and environmental health care by 5% pa and current medical care by 2.5% pa,

An overall growth of spending on healthcare being around 5% pa.

REFLECT

Such a gathering at this WFPHA and UKPHF conference gives decision makers and advisors an opportunity to reflect on three major questions:

1. Is our current paradigm of healthcare, personal and public, meaningful in the Western world, is it making us healthy?
2. Since this health care paradigm cannot be financed in the foreseeable future in the developing world, is there an alternative for them ?
3. How can any health system that fails despite vast funding in the developed countries and fails because of grossly inadequate funding elsewhere be morally, and rationally acceptable and politically sustainable?

PLAN AND ACT NOW FOR A HEALTHIER WORLD

Health cannot be engineered, manufactured, prescribed, neither for society nor for an individual.

Health is linked inextricably with living fully and the joy of life.

No one can make another healthy, it is our individual responsibility to live as fully and joyfully as we can.

As Scott Williamson said there are three states of living : living, surviving and dying.

We all spend some of our day in each of them, the more time spent on living the better our chances of being healthy.

If there is any validity in this idea all, public health programmes that are simply judged on increased life expectancy must be flawed.

What governments can do is to make the environment we live, work and play in, better for such joyful living.

We all need to live out a new vision of a loving, mutually supportive, caring world.

This quiet revolution starts with each one of us today.

Today's dreams and visions will become tomorrow's reality.

References

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5. Adams, Dr. Patch (1993) Gesundheit!: Bringing Good Health to You, the Medical System, and Society Through Physician Service, Complementary Therapies, Humor, and Joy. ISBN 0 89281 781
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9. Kelly, dr Robin. (2000) Healing Ways ISBN 0 14 029693
10. Capra, Fritjof (1996) The Web of Life ISBN 0 00 654751 6
11. Capra, Fritjof (1982) The Turning Point ISBN 0 553 34572 9
12. Illich, Ivan (1977). Medical nemesis . ISBN: 1842300075
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14. Siegel, Bernie (1982) Peace, Love & Healing ISBN0 7126 7051 3
15. Hunter, David (2003) Public Health Policy ISBN0 7456 25647 5
16. Wennberg J E (2002) New Scientist Aug 17 2002 :26
17. The Economist (2002) 17th Aug 2002 ID 1280587
18. Global Initiative for Traditional Systems Conference (1995) Oxford University <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~wgtrr/giftcon2.htm>

RECOMMENDED READING

Just some of the books that have influenced my thinking,

Kaptchuk, Ted & M Croucher The Healing Arts ISBN 0563 20447 8

Zukav, Gary The Dancing Wu Li Masters, An Overview of New Physics ISBN 0 7126 3817 2

Pearse, Innes H The Quality of Life The Peckham Approach to Human Ethology ISBN 7073 0141 6

Kosko, Bart Fuzzy Thinking, The New Science of Fuzzy Logic ISBN 0 00 654713 3

Holden, Robert Happiness Now! ISBN 0 340 71309 7

Hartman, Thom The Last Hours of Ancient Sunshine ISBN 0 609 80529 0

Kubler-Ross, Elizabeth Life Lessons ISBN 0 7432 0811 0
Gleick, James, Chaos, Making a New Science ISBN 0 349 10525 1
Holbeche, Soozie Changes A New Way of Living in the Next Millenium ISBN 0 7499 1763 6
Chopra, Deepak Ageless Body Timeless Mind ISBN0 7126 5673 1
Lovelock, James Healing Gaia (1991) ISBN 0517578484
Simonton, O Carl, et alia Getting Well Again ISBN 0553280333
Stanway, Dr. Andrew The New Natural Family Doctor ISBN 0 85675 057 4

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