

Graduate Program in Public Health Contemporary Health Issues “What is Prevention”

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I. What is "Prevention" About?

Health, disease, illness, wellness, health promotion, disease prevention

II. Definitions

A. Let's begin with health

There are numerous, non-exclusive, definitions of health. Drawing from them and developed over a period of many years, mine is that:

"Health is a positive, balanced, state of being characterized by: the best achievable physical, psychological, emotional, intellectual, and social levels of functioning at a given time, the absence of disease or the optimal management of chronic disease, and the control of both internal and external risk factors for both diseases and negative health conditions." Also in my terms, health is a state of being that can be measured at any given point in time.

B. Disease and Illness

Disease, according to the 1987, 2nd ed. of the Random House Unabridged Dictionary, is, in part:

"a disordered or incorrectly functioning organ, part, structure, or system of the body resulting from the effect of genetic or developmental errors, infection, poisons, nutritional deficiency or imbalance, toxicity, or unfavorable environmental factors;"
Illness/sickness is what someone feels: "I feel ill/sick," or as one sage observer put it many years ago: "Illness is what one has on the way to the doctor's office; disease is what one has on the way home."

C. Wellness

Here are several definitions that, once again, are not mutually exclusive. According to the late Dr. Halbert Dunn, a former Public Health Service physician, who was the first to develop the concept of what he called "high-level wellness," it is:

"an integrated method of functioning which is oriented toward maximizing the potential of which the individual is capable. It requires that the individual maintain a continuum of balance and purposeful direction within the environment where he is functioning."

Dr. Donald Ardell, considered by many to be the contemporary "Dean of Wellness," has offered and continues to offer many definitions of the term. One useful one is:

"Wellness is about perspective, about balance and about the big picture. It is a lifestyle and a personalized approach to living your life in such a way that you enjoy maximum freedom, including freedom FROM illness/disability and premature death to the extent possible, and freedom TO experience life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is a declaration of independence for becoming the best kind of person that your potentials, circumstances and fate will allow."

In my own view, the essence of Wellness is that it is a process of being, a mental process for achieving the desiderata of life set forth by Drs. Dunn and Ardell as well as others. It is a process of being that is for those who engage in it ongoing over time. The process is for living proactively, using self-assessment, defining success in one's own terms, goal-setting for oneself, and mobilizing one's own motivation, in a continuous positive feedback loop.

D. Health Promotion

According to the First International Conference on Health Promotion, which created the "Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion," "health promotion" is (Breslow, L. "Social Ecological Strategies for Healthy Lifestyles," Am. J. Hlth. Promotion, 10, 253, 1996):

"the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their own health."

Michael O'Donnell and colleagues developed a perhaps more useful definition of health promotion for the American Journal of Health Promotion (3, 5, 1989):

"Health promotion is the science and art of helping people change their lifestyle to move toward a state of optimal health. Optimal health is defined as a balance of physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual health. Lifestyle change can be facilitated through a combination of efforts to enhance awareness, change behavior and create environments that support good health practices. Of the three, supportive environments will probably have the greatest impact in producing lasting change."

Tannahill and colleagues offered a brief one (Tannahill, A., "What is Health Promotion?" Health Education Journal, 44, 167-68, 1985):

"Health promotion comprises three overlapping spheres of activity: health education, (or, more precisely, that part of which contributes to the overall goal of health promotion), prevention, and *health protection* [to which we shall return later].

III. The Eight Central Concepts of Health Promotion, Disease Prevention, and Wellness (by Dr. J.)

A. The "Substantive" Concepts

These Concepts define and describe what health and wellness are and are about, what their theoretical and philosophical substance is, and how they (that is, health and wellness) may be characterized and understood, both in individuals and in the abstract.

1. Health is a state of being; wellness is a process of being.
2. Health and Wellness each have a natural history.
3. Health status is determined by a wide array of internal and external risk factors, personal actions and in-actions, and health-promoting interventions.
4. Risks to health can be reduced; in few instances is there certainty of outcome.
5. Achieving balance is the essence of both healthy living and Wellness.

B. The "Process" Concepts

These are the common denominators of how individuals change their behaviors. They describe the routes one takes to get to a healthy/well state of being, using the five substantive Concepts to inform the process. These last three Concepts thus deal with the single common mental pathway that one uses to go about becoming and being both healthy and well, about how to incorporate health and wellness into one's life, on the personal level.

1. There is a Common Pathway to Success for Most Personal Behavior Change Efforts
 - a. The Stages of Change: The Prochaska-DiClemente model (with Dr. J.'s slight modifications).
 - i. Pre-contemplation
 - ii. Contemplation
 - iii. Preparation/planning
 - iv. Action
 - v. Maintenance/relapse
 - vi. Permanent Maintenance
 - b. Dr. J.'s further modification for his Ordinary Mortals® Pathway to Mobilizing Motivation model: The Six **Phases** of Behavior Change
 - i. Not on the radar screen.
 - ii. Thinking about it.
 - iii. Going to get going.
 - iv. On the Ordinary Mortals® Pathway to Mobilizing Motivation.
 - v. Getting going!
 - vi. Making it part of one's life.
2. Motivation is a process, not a thing

Motivation is a *mental* process that connects a thought or a feeling with an action.

3. The Central Tasks in Making Personal Behavior Changes

Assessment, Goal Setting, and Mobilizing Motivation, which lead to the Five Steps of: The Ordinary Mortals® Pathway to Mobilizing Motivation.

- a. Self-assessment
- b. Defining Success
- c. Setting goals
- d. Establishing priorities
- e. Taking control

C. The Five Steps of the "OM® Pathway" in Some More Detail

1. Self-assessment is asking yourself questions like: where am I now? How did I get here? What do I like about myself? What do I not like? What would I like to change? What is going on in my life that would facilitate behavior change? Inhibit it?
2. Defining success has to be done in the context of you as a person, what your measure of your innate skills and capabilities is. To work for you, "success" as you define it has to be something that is reasonable, realistic and conceivably achievable, for you, given who you are as a person and what else is going on your life (see also 4, below). It has to be such that you are not setting yourself up for failure. Defining success productively also includes giving yourself permission to fail, assuming that you really did try.
3. Goal-setting is accomplished by answering questions like: to where do I want to get? Why do I want to get there? For whom would I be making the change; others, or myself? What do I expect to get out of the change, should I achieve it? What do I think I can reasonably expect to do? What are the "give-ups," and can I, do I want to, commit to them? Arriving at satisfactory answers to these questions for yourself is absolutely key. For doing so, answering the questions "what do I really want to do and why do I want to do it," provides the focus and the concentration you must have in order to have the best chance of success in the chosen endeavour.
4. Establishing Priorities among your specific goals and between your new goals and the rest of your life is central to making the whole process work for you. If you have set more than one goal, what is their ranking? Which do you consider to be the most important to achieve? Which the least? In addition, what about priorities between your new goal(s) and other important things that are going on in your life, like family, friends, other leisure time activities, and your job? (See also 2, above.) If juggling needs to be done, it will be very helpful to do some thinking about that and yes, set your priorities.
5. Taking Control means putting yourself in charge of the whole process, adopting an "I can do this" attitude and perspective, given that the first four steps have been followed, of not depending upon anyone else but also not taking anyone else's direction (advice on both process and content is fine, direction in the sense of "you must do this" is not), of accepting responsibility for both success and failure.

D. The Eight Keys to Taking Control

Since for most people, making change for themselves, not anyone else, is central to achieving a successful outcome, taking personal control of the whole process is essential. Taking Control itself has eight keys.

1. Understanding that motivation is not a thing, but a process that links a thought or a feeling with an action.
2. Following the first four steps of the Ordinary Mortals® Pathway to Mobilizing Your Motivation, from the beginning.
3. Making sure to examine what you already do well: health-promoting behaviors that are part of your life.
4. Recognizing that gradual change leads to permanent changes.
5. Setting reasonable and rational goals; being ready to explore your limits while recognizing your limitations.
6. Dealing with the fear both of failure and of success.
7. Appreciating the process of psychological immediate gratification.
8. Understanding that we can never be perfect; we can always get better.

IV. Prevention and Preventive Services

A. The Categories

1. Primary prevention is stopping disease before it starts, by such measures as risk factor modification, environmental intervention, and immunization.
2. Secondary prevention is the early detection of existing disease before it becomes clinically apparent, followed by effective referral and treatment.
3. Tertiary prevention is the effective management of clinically apparent disease so as to forestall to the greatest degree possible the development of possible future complications. (In essence, tertiary prevention is nothing more, or less, than good medical practice in the management of clinically apparent disease.)

B. The "Placement" of Health Promotive/Disease Preventive Services

1. Personal preventive services, at all three levels, are those applied to individuals.
2. Community preventive services are those applied to groups of people and populations as a whole.
3. Combined preventive services, like certain immunizations that can create herd immunity, apply to both individuals and groups.

C. Dr. J's "Basic Ten" Personal Health Promoting/Disease Preventing

Activities/Behaviors, undertaken on the Wellness Road.

1. Exercising regularly
2. Managing one's weight
3. Eating a healthy diet
4. Not using tobacco products, or the prescription psychoactive drugs on a non-prescription basis
5. Safe use of the other non-prescription mood-altering drugs, including ethyl alcohol
6. Managing one's internal and external stressors effectively
7. Using safe sexual practices
8. Protecting one's personal safety in the home, in the automobile, and at the workplace
9. Maintaining one's immune status at an effective level
10. Undergoing periodic health-risk/wellness-status appraisal.

D. The Basic Nine Public Health Services

1. Immunization
2. Pure Water supply
3. Sanitary sewage disposal
4. Sanitary solid waste disposal
5. Communicable disease control
6. Air pollution control
7. Water pollution control
8. Safe nuclear waste disposal
9. Dealing with global warming/climate change