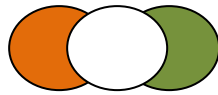


**Post Graduate Certificate Course in Health System and Management - 2013**



Module 1: Chapter 2

## **Concept of Health**



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**Indian Association of Preventive and Social Medicine  
Gujarat Chapter**

## Concept of Health

There are many views as to what constitutes “health”. One view puts it as “absence of disease”, i.e. there are no impediments to an individual’s functioning or survival.

The problem inherent in the “absence of disease” definition is that it focuses only on disease. However, there is, in every disease, a long phase of transition from actual health to the overt disease process. Hence, health is something much more than the mere absence of disease. The widely used definition of health by WHO, which states “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. This definition is commonly seen as the statement of an “ideal” towards which nations should aspire, rather than as a practical working definition. For this reason, an “operational” definition of health, one drawn from the above “ideal” definition, has been forwarded, by a technical study group of WHO.

According to this definition, the concept of health is viewed as being of two orders - first, in a broad sense, health can be seen as a condition or quality of the human organism in given conditions : genetic and environmental.

Secondly, in a narrow sense, more useful for working purposes, health means: There is no obvious evidence of diseases and that the person is functioning “normally”, i.e. conforming within normal limits of variations to the standards of health criteria, generally accepted for one’s age, sex, community and geographic region and, That various organs of the body are functioning adequately in themselves and in relation to one another, which implies a kind of equilibrium or homeostasis.

In addition there are various determinants of health as well as indicators of health which we will not discuss here. We aim to clarify on certain concepts which are as under.

### **Preventive Medicine**

Preventive Medicine is that branch of medicine which deals with promoting health and preventing disease. The cardinal goal of preventive medicine is to avert the occurrence of disease. Achievement of this goal requires that actions be directed at the earliest stage of the natural history of disease, i.e. stage of susceptibility, using the methods of health promotion and specific protection; and to some extent, methods of secondary prevention by early detection of disease when it may be otherwise not detected using usual methods of diagnosis, often by screening followed by appropriate intervention. However, in a broader sense, preventive medicine refers to “limiting” the progression of disease at any stage of its course. Thus, when a clinician, using the approach of curative medicine, diagnosis and treats a patient of pulmonary tuberculosis, she is practicing preventive medicine too, since she is “preventing” the progress of the disease from the mild / uncomplicated phase to one of complications and more disability.

## **Public Health**

“The science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting physical health and efficiency through organized community efforts for the sanitation of the environment, the control of community infections, the education of the individual in principles of personal hygiene, the organization of medical and nursing services for the early diagnosis and preventive treatment of diseases and the development of social machinery which will ensure to every individual, in the community, a standard of living adequate for maintenance of health”.

Thus public health is best identified as a social movement concerned with protecting and promoting the collective health of the community.

While mostly public health activities are funded and regulated by the Governments (National or State), the work of voluntary health agencies is also very much part of public health activities since they represent an organized community effort and systematic social action. In fact, even a small movement by a small village to purify their drinking water source or to stop alcohol drinking is also very much a public health activity.

## **Preventive Medicine versus Public Health**

The dividing line between preventive medicine and public health is actually a very thin, rather hazy one. Preventive medicine is an overall science; public health is an approach within this science. When preventive medicine starts focusing on population groups rather than individuals and utilises the approach of ‘organised community efforts’ it takes the shape of public health.

The other approach of using preventive medicine is the “individualized” preventive medicine, for instance, immunising an otherwise healthy child, or the “clinical” preventive medicine, which can be very effectively practiced in clinical settings; for example, a doctor who educates her ante-natal case about breast feeding or a doctor who takes a pap smear from her patients who are attending a family planning clinic is actually practicing individualized or clinical preventive medicine, but, may be, not public health. On the other hand when the government or even a Non Governmental Organization (NGO) working with community members in a village, organises a health education program in breast feeding for expectant mothers, or organises a cervical cancer screening camp, the approach becomes that of public health.

## **Social Medicine**

The fact that man is a social animal, it is apparent that any effort at preventing or curing the disease or making an assessment of the health problems has to take social factors into account. This is, in essence, the concept of social medicine. Subsequently, the concepts of social medicine merged with preventive medicine, to form the specialty of preventive & social medicine

## **Socialized Medicine**

Socialized Medicine is different form Social Medicine. It refers to the policy of providing complete medical care, preventive and curative, to all members of a society (usually a nation) as a governmental commitment and out of governmental (public) finances, as is the policy in Russia.

## **Community Medicine**

As a professional movement, Community medicine (or Community Health) is the most recent of the three fields to emerge in medical education and medical practice. As a discipline, it is defined as that branch of medicine, which addresses certain selected aspects of health promotion, disease prevention, health restoration (by curative steps) and rehabilitation of the former patients, in the community, usually, from an "Institutional Community Base" which is usually either an Academic Department in a medical college or through a curative centre. Community medicine, as an approach, has borrowed heavily from the concepts, methods and approaches of its two elder sisters, viz. public health and preventive medicine.

Community medicine is one pathway for representing an institution's commitment to improving health of its immediate (or adopted) community - generally a medical college, hospital or a clinical department serve as the base. The health task is to define the health problems, propose solutions, maintain surveillance, evaluate progress and monitor the use of resources. The approaches employed range from tools of epidemiology to the social skills, necessary for involvement with the community. Central to the approach of community medicine, whether in academia or in practice, is the promise that the main factors that determine a community's health are to be found within the community itself - in its social, cultural or biological features, or in its environment - natural and man-made.

In UK, community medicine essentially includes Epidemiology and Medical Administration and has been seen as a successor to public health, providing information and advice on the health status and the services to the community and to the local Self Govt / community organizations, as well as performing other planning and management functions. Thus, in UK, the community medicine specialist is trained to function as Medical Officer of Health (MOH).