

Draft of actionable points to be undertaken by various stakeholders towards developing a Health Promoting HEI

Introduction:

In true conformity to the old adage: mens sana in corpore sano —sound mind in a healthy body, the health status of an individual is intimately related to and is inseparable from a quest for academic accomplishments. Student health is a critical foundation on which students can optimize their learning, reach their potential and achieve their academic goals.

Health promotion thus assumes special significance. Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over and improve their health through the overlapping spheres of health education, environmental modifications, nutritional interventions, lifestyle and behavioral changes, prevention and health protection.

The WHO has developed the 'Settings Based Approach' (SBA) to health promotion. WHO defines SBA to health promotion as those that: involve a holistic and multi-disciplinary method which integrates action across risk factors.

Problem Statement:

Students entering Higher Educational Institutes (HEIs) face a range of health risks. They are often exposed to harmful products such as tobacco, alcohol and drugs; they face greater risks of violence (including homicide) and road traffic injuries and can experience devastating mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, self-harm escalating to suicide, substance abuse, diet related disorders (DRDs) etc.

The prevalence of physical inactivity among adolescents is around 70%; not surprisingly therefore the prevalence of obesity in adolescents in India is rising. The prevalence of common mental morbidity including depression in age 18-29 years is around 9 %. Tobacco use in age group 15-24 years is 12.5 %. 90% of adult smokers begin smoking before age of 18 years. 1% women and 11 % men aged 15-19 years consume alcohol. Further, precursors of all Non- communicable Diseases (NCDs) are found in youth 1/10 a person aged 18 years and above have raised blood glucose levels. Every fourth individual in India aged above 18 years has high blood pressure.

Way forward with specific reference to the role of Higher Educational Institutes (HEIs):

India is a young nation; as such investment in preventing important health risks among youth is one of the most cost-effective investments a nation can make to improve education and health. Many of the factors that affect health and well-being are beyond individual control and hence require interventions in the form of health promotion. Educational institutions can play critical role in health promotion and have the ability to create a learning environment and organizational culture that enhances the health, wellbeing and enables people (students, staff, and visitors) to achieve their full potential..

It is critical to understand the interplay of all the above aspects covering healthcare, economics and development with specific reference to India's youth power and exploiting the potential (but yet untapped) role of higher educational institutes (especially universities).

HEIs can create a learning environment and organizational culture that enhances the health, wellbeing and sustainability of its community and enables people (students, staff, and visitors) to achieve their full potential. Given their vast reach and captive audience of young students, HEIs focusing on Health Promotion can be one of the most cost effective investments a nation can make to simultaneously improve education and health. Investing in health and wellbeing is a 'win-win' situation for all stakeholders as healthy students and healthy staff will increase levels of achievement, performance and productivity. Moreover, 'Health for All' is a precondition for and an indicator of sustainable development. Health promoting settings and action across sectors is needed to achieve Sustainable Development Goals, including the goal to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for 'All at all Ages' (SDG 3). Health promotion activities can and need to be planned, implemented, monitored, and evaluated utilizing an integrated approach provided by the enabling environments of universities through a 'Settings Based Approach'. The earlier it is implemented, the better it is!. Thus emerges the concept of a Health Promoting Higher Educational Institutions (HEI).

Although each setting is unique, drawing on the experiences of other settings-based work globally will help in developing the concept of the health promoting university in India. This will contribute to the broader agenda of public health by reorienting the focus of health services from curative to preventive health as outlined in the National Health Policy 2017, help in implementing the vision of the proposed New Education Policy which seeks to produce better citizens of tomorrow and ultimately thereby contributing to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 3).

Vision:

An sustainable environment that is enabling for physical, mental, social, emotional and intellectual well-being of students and staff (adapted from The Okanagan Charter).

Mission:

Our Students enjoy a very high level of health; for them healthy lifestyle, practices & wellness is a way of life.

Goal:

By 2022, at least 50% of higher educational institutions implementing core principles/ set standards of Health Promoting Universities.

Objectives:

1. Promoting healthy and sustainable policies and planning throughout the Higher Educational Institutions
2. Providing healthy working environments
3. Offering healthy and supportive social environments
4. Establishing and improving primary health care
5. Facilitating personal and social development
6. Ensuring a healthy and sustainable physical environment
7. Encouraging wider academic interest and developments in health promotion
8. Developing links with the community

The key objectives of a Health Promoting HEI are elaborated separately.

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