

2011 HSC PDHPE QUESTION 23

Social justice key terms – equity, diversity and supportive environments

Examples of health promotion initiatives could include Oxfam Australia's *Close the Gap*, which aims to: increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' access to health services (access)

address critical social issues, such as poor housing, nutrition, employment and education (access), among Indigenous Australians build Indigenous control and participation in the delivery of health and other services (participation) get governments at the state and national level to work in partnership with Indigenous Australian communities, health organisations and experts to develop and monitor a plan to tackle the Indigenous health crisis in Australia (participation).

Developing personal skills can only occur if education is assured for all individuals. Staying on at school until at least Year 10 will undoubtedly positively effect a person's ability to make informed health decisions. So for **equity** to be achieved, access to education is imperative. An example of this would be PDHPE lessons, in which information and issues around smoking are discussed.

Diversity is about ensuring that information is relevant to all people, irrespective of their age, gender, culture, geographic location, sexuality or socioeconomic status. This is where the 'one size fits all' approach to health promotion reaps little success. Programs must be able to be personalised in order to target all individuals. Consider a pamphlet that describes how to conduct breast self-examinations in order to detect the early signs of breast cancer. This pamphlet would develop the skills of a greater group of women if it was available in many different languages and included self-explanatory graphics that could be understood by all women, regardless of their level of education.

It is crucial for an individual to develop their personal skills if they are going to overcome any negative influence their environment may have on them.

Developing personal skills supports the notion of **supportive environments** by empowering individuals through the teaching of knowledge and skills, which they can pass on to others in their environment. If a parent is educated about healthy food habits, they will provide nutritious foods for their children, which will reduce the chance of them developing a diet-related illness such as diabetes.

Creating supportive environments

Any health promotion initiative that addresses and acknowledges the influence of a person's environment will have an increased chance of success. If a local council improves the lighting and security of the local bicycle track, it will increase the chance of the track being used by people either in the early hours of the morning or later in the evening. This increased level of availability may

encourage members of the community to use the track and therefore improve their physical fitness. This is how a *community* can assume some responsibility for promoting health.

Reorienting health services

In order for equity to be achieved, health services must be culturally sensitive and respect the diverse needs of all people, irrespective of their cultural backgrounds. Doctors should be aware of how their patients' backgrounds may influence their health choices, rather than just addressing the symptoms that patients are displaying.

All individuals, irrespective of educational background, should have equal opportunities to train in the promotion of health as well as the provision of health services, in order to increase the health outcomes of their own community and those of others. This would uphold the social justice principle of equity.

The benefit of research into health conditions is that it can improve health outcomes for all groups of people, particularly if it encourages change in negative lifestyle behaviours. This aspect of reorientating health services addresses diversity and equity, as all people in the future can reap the positives outcomes of important research, whether it is scientific or social.

Building healthy public policy

Through implementing legislation, policies and fiscal measures, governments can work towards creating equity among individuals and across different populations. Laws can ensure that all people are treated fairly, irrespective of their social markers. For example:

All workplaces have government-enforced smoking bans that protect both blue-collar and white-collar workers.

The Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) is an example of how the social justice principle of equity is addressed by the Commonwealth Government. The government recognises that not all people can afford the cost of prescription drugs, so it subsidises the cost of medication to assist people from low socioeconomic backgrounds in order to create equal access for everyone.

The 'no hat, no play' policy in primary schools promotes a supportive environment for the good health of children. Since wearing a hat during breaks is compulsory, this protects children from exposure to UV and reduces the chance of them developing skin cancer.