

LIFE AT KYAMBOGO UNIVERSITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR HEALTH AND QUALITY OF LIFE FOR THE COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a response to a meeting with the Medical Officer in-charge of the Medical Centre, Health Staff, Wardens, Sport Science Department Staff and Union representative of Kyambogo University. In the meeting, concern was raised over the increasing cases of stress, sexuality, hypertension, over-weight and other cardiac related problems amongst students, staff and the community around Kyambogo University. In the paper, therefore, the author examines the various determinants of healthy living and makes suggestions for the improvement and maintenance of the quality of life for the community.

INTRODUCTION

The main determinant of one's quality of life from childhood to old age is the kind of lifestyle one leads. An individual can adopt the kind of behaviour and habits that will influence the probabilities of negative or positive health outcomes. Much of the quality of life of the later years depends on the daily choices a person makes in youth and on the habits that becomes fixed as a result of those choices. People have some control over the fate of their later years; numerous studies show that people who understand this usually take care of themselves in later life and are more active and energetic than others of their age.

This paper presents main factors that risk the lives of people from their childhood to old age and suggests why the undesirable risk factors should be avoided. In addition, guidelines are provided on how the high quality of life can be maintained as one advances in age. Finally, recommendations are provided for the actual implementation of the suggested guidelines.

Concern for High Quality of Life

People's quality of life is a phenomenon that specifically focuses on the status of their health or wellness (Anspaugh et al. 1994). These concepts refer to a number of qualities that are important to persons of all ages, that is: physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual health. People who enjoy these qualities of health can effectively go about their activities of daily life and contribute towards the development of their communities and nation. Healthy people are energetic, alert, curious, creative, stimulating, optimistic and generally happy (Jackson et al; 1999). Healthy elderly persons have higher chances of living longer than the unhealthy ones (Mullen et al; 1999). People who adopt habits reduce the risk of subjecting them to ill health in their old age can assist to cut down on the huge sums of resources used in meeting expenses of medical care.

Risk Factors that Comprise the Quality of Life

Over years, the effects of people's lifestyle behaviours accumulate, improving or damaging the quality of their lives and even altering their statistical life expectancy (Hafen et al; 1988). It is therefore, important that people, from their early to late stages of life, get to be aware of the risk behaviours that can definitely comprise their wellness. Available research findings lead to serious medical conditions such as high blood pressure, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, functional impairment and diseases of the heart, which appear common, as people get old. These chronic medical conditions can be evaded by avoiding foods high in fat.

- Cigarette smoking and drug abuse is a dangerous habit that brings about serious (McLatchie, 1993). From research findings, inactivity and low levels of fitness of the cardiorespiratory system, muscular strength and endurance, flexibility and percent body fat have negative effects on the body and trigger degenerative chronic diseases in old age such as coronary heart diseases, high blood pressure, arthritis, diabetes and osteoporosis. Inactivity in old age further facilitates the physiological degenerative changes that adversely affect the functional ability of aged persons (Sagiv, 2001).
- Chronic consumption of too much alcohol has effects of enormous range and complexity throughout the body. Research has shown that consumption of alcohol in large quantities causes lesions, myocardial disease, hypertension, blood coagulation, one's quality of life from child.

High Quality of Life in Later Years

The physiological decline in the function and efficiency of body organs systems that manifest during aging generally weakening the body and make aged people more prone to health problems. The physiological changes are also accompanied with visible physical changes which still weigh down on older persons. The adoptions of risky health habits from childhood further compound mental, emotional, social and spiritual problems in old age (Turner et al; 1992). However, most of the various health problems can be prevented, delayed, controlled or even reversed through healthy habits. Based on research findings, Hafen, et. al. (1988); Jackson et. al (1999) and Turner, et. al. (1992) have summarized the main healthy habits crucial to maintaining a high quality of life in old age as including the following:

- Getting proper and adequate nutrition. Emphasis is put on eating a well-balanced diet that contains all the necessary nutrients (vitamins, proteins, carbohydrates, fatty acids, mineral salts and water). It is important for people to seek advice on nutrition habits from nutritionists.
- Participation in appropriate and suitable exercise on a regular basis so as to enhance body fitness and alleviate or control the effect of degenerative diseases of old age. Physical fitness has many components. Traditionally, these have included:
 1. Agility
 2. Balance
 3. Cardio-respiratory capacity
 4. Coordination
 5. Flexibility
 6. Muscular endurance
 7. Power
 8. Reaction
 9. Speed
 10. Strength

HEALTH BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

1. Improved physiological functioning of the body
2. Improved appearance
3. Increased efficiency of the heart and lungs
4. Increased muscle strength and endurance
5. Reduced stress response
6. Protection from lower back problems
7. Possible delay in the aging process
8. Maintenance of proper body weight
9. Possible reduction of the risk of coronary heart disease
10. Naturally induced fatigue and relaxation

Other Benefits include

- Get immediate medical attention for any medical problem before it gets worse. In addition, aged persons should be careful about getting regular physical and medical check ups to detect any potential problem.
- Have adequate rest by sleeping for at least seven to eight hours each night.
- Avoid overexposure to the sun as a way of preventing or delaying the aging of the skin with advancing chronological age. As people grow older, the skin becomes thinner, looser, dryer, less elastic and more wrinkled, characteristics, which can be minimized by avoiding sitting in the sun for prolonged hours.
- Observe safety habits to prevent falls and many subsequent fractures due to the porous and weak skeletal bones in old age.
- Staying in clean environments that are also free of any forms of pollution.
- Observing and maintaining acceptable standards of hygiene and personal health.

- Persons who are born with an inherited medical condition should strive to learn more about the ailment and adopt behaviours that will postpone its onset, reduce its severity, or maximize wellness within the limits the disease imposes.
- Staying in contact with family and friends. One of the hallmarks of good health is the ability to relate with others, to be outgoing, friendly, affectionate and willing to share with them.
- Keeping a positive attitude towards life; being optimistic and having faith in life help aging individuals to withstand even the most massive stress.
- Beginning a sound long-term financial plan and maintaining it in old age. This is a sure way of providing livelihood in the later years when people experience limited functional capacity.

CONCLUSION

The quality of life in old age is largely dependent on the degree to which people take care of themselves right from childhood. Choices of health habits made early in life will have either positive or negative impact on the quality of overall health in old age. Habits that have side effects and detrimental to our bodies must be avoided early in life and through into old age. Behaviours and practices that promote people's physical, mental, spiritual, emotional and social health should be identified and observed to ensure and maintain high quality of life.

In order to improve the quality of life at Kyambogo University, it is recommended that the Health personnel will need to work together with the wardens and staff from the Sports Science, Psychology, Sports and

Games as well as the Personnel and Union sections of the University with a view to:

- (i) Sensitise people on the risk factors likely to affect the quality of life at Kyambogo University.
- (ii) Encourage more recreational activities including free play, walking, jogging and running at own time as opposed to the constant use of motorbike and vehicle even for short distances by staff and students.
- (iii) Establish a health club that can provide fitness and recreational activities for staff, students and the community.
- (iv) Establish a peer-counselling programme for staff and students on campus that will often address related issues and problems regularly.
- (v) Establish a regular forum through which information relating to the quality of life can be passed to the students, staff and the community – open days, seminar, public lecturers, etc.

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