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School Health Project in Macau

For many schools, “School Health Promotion” may mean “Only an item of Health Education” or “Just a new item”.

To tell the truth, “School Health Promotion” is an important unit of “Healthy City – Macau”, concerning 25% of the Macau population, who are the future pillars of the society. It is about the health of Macau’s children and adolescents who are the hopes of the years to come. It is only when children and adolescents possess good health that they are able to study well and master well what they have learned to welcome the various challenges of the society.

In this globalization and urbanization epoch, as an international touristic city, Macau is facing great health risk brought by urbanization and the intense tourist flow. The varying modes of life due to the scientific improvement, the negligence of taking exercise, the unhealthy diets and the practice of smoking, etc. are obviously seen in our city development, bringing about cancer cases and non-contagious illnesses and forming the main causes of deaths of the Macau population. The modification of a city does have an impact on our sense of value, psychological health and interpersonal relationship.

By the threat of serious acute respiratory syndrome and avian flu, we deeply understand that health is not an obligatory gift and illness has brought to the community a very serious effect. To maintain a healthy city it does not depend solely on the Health Department but the full effort of other Departments and organizations.

“Healthy City” is a plan set to solve health risks derived from globalization and urbanization.

On 13th June 2004, all the citizens of Macau, with one accord, set in motion the Healthy City Campaign. The ceremony was highlighted by the Chief Executive, Mr. Ho Hau Wah’s most solemn pledge made to the whole world and to the World Health Organization that we will strive to be a health city. This shows that Macau holds the strongest wish to become a healthy city of full vitality and vigour.

The “Healthy City – Macau” Project spurs the inhabitants to be concerned about the policy and motivation of changing their life style and improving their environment. This means there will be strong intervention in the setting of schools, workplaces, smokeless environment, healthy diets and physical exercises. Among them, “School Health Promotion” is most important.

According to the survey of the health situation of the adolescents performed by the Health Bureau in 2004, the statistics showed that 20% of the students were overweight or too much overweight; nearly 95% of the students did not take the least necessary vegetable units; more than 70% of the students did not perform the appropriate physical exercise and among them 20% did no exercise at all. Of all the students, around a quarter had taken up the habit of smoking and 7% are the present smokers. 40% of the former smokers said they first smoked before the age 13. The survey also showed that the age of Macau smokers held a downward tendency with an increase of female participants. It is quite common that the secondary students have tried alcoholic drinks and almost 50% of them had their first drink younger than 13 years old. The survey also showed that drug abuse was also holding a young age tendency and the number of female participants was increasing also. As for mental health, nearly 20% of the

students did think of harming themselves or even had practically done so. For acts of violence, it was more frequently done among the male students than the female ones and the junior secondary students did behave more erroneously than the senior secondary group. For safety measures, the majority of the students participated in danger-causing activities of bicycle riding, skateboard riding, roller-skating, etc. but lacking the sense of self-protection.

Schools have always been the important venues for children and adolescents to acquire education. During that schooling time of theirs, the physical and psychological development, the knowledge seeking and community life practice lay a significant foundation for “School Health Promotion”. With a school intervention practice, it will be a small investment offering an effective outcome. Through the learning in school, the daily practice and exercising, the knowledge, the attitude and conviction, behaviour and conduct of health and self healthcare techniques, the situation will be well improved. All these will result in healthiness and wellness.

In the mid-eighties of the twentieth century, some European countries already started the “School Health Promotion” project. In 1991, the “School Health Promotion” project network was on trial exertion in Hungary, Czech, Slovak and Poland. However, the “School Health Promotion” network was formally established in Europe only in 1992 and till 1996, there were already 38 European Country participants. In the early nineties of the twentieth century, the West Pacific Region of the World Health Organization initiated enthusiastically the “School Health Promotion” project and health promotion schools in the countries of Australia, Singapore and Fiji were first established. In the document “New Horizons in Health” of the World Health Organization in 1995, the concept of “School Health Promotion” was mentioned. In December of the same year, the “Programme Principles of School Health Promotion Development” were instituted and issued. In 1997, China instigated the West Pacific Region “School Health Promotion” network operational meeting which symbolized “School Health Promotion” was gradually and formally propagated in West Pacific Region. Macau also took steps to introduce the “School Health Promotion” concept in 1997, whereas 1998-2000 was the feasibility study stage, 2001 - 2003 was the trial stage and as the Healthy City Project was in motion in 2004, it is gradually popularized in Macau.

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“School Health Promotion” stresses that the mutual effort exerted by the schools, teachers, students, parents and the community to which the school belonged, a healthy environment suitable for learning, working, relaxing and playing, as well as living, will be created.

The main tasks to be performed:

1. Help the children and adolescents to cultivate a healthy living mode

“School Health Promotion” imparts to the students systematically the knowledge of Health through classroom or non-classroom impartation, for example: balanced diets, appropriate exercise, visual protection, oral health protection, help the students to cultivate a healthy living mode to enhance quality health.

2. Promote the quality physique of the teachers and students

To be in pace with the Health Department, which is offering prevention and treatment services, the school should take positive measures to improve the health situation of the teachers and students to promote their level of wellness.

3. Offer to the students, the teaching and non-teaching staff, fine learning and working environment

Through the utilization of all the possible resources of the school, promote the teaching and learning conditions, the various pedagogic and living facilities to offer a substantial environment to enhance a healthy situation, for example: improvement of classroom lighting and ventilation, equipping in the school campus safe and hygienic drinking water installation, provision of safe and healthy diet and installation of physical exercise facilities.

4. Enhance the psychological health of the children, adolescents and teachers

The psychological operations of the children and adolescents are quite complicated but it is at this stage that they are to learn to acquire a stable and healthy mind when they grow into adults. Therefore, the enhancement of the psychological health of theirs is very important. At present, the younger generation of Macau fails to master the correct objectives of life, being too reliant, weak-willed, lacking team spirit, and having low psychological competency to handle frustration. On the other hand, in facing the various pressures of pedagogic duties, the expectations of the school authorities and parents, the teachers are unable to obtain their job satisfaction, causing them to lose the enthusiasm for their profession. Through appropriate psychological instructions, support, assistance and guidance, the psychological health of the teachers and students will be enhanced and consolidated.

The six categories of “School Health Promotion” include: 1) School Health Policy, 2) School Environment, 3) School Tradition/Interpersonal Relationship, 4) Community Relationship, 5) Personal Health Living Skills, and 6) School Healthcare Service.

The indispensable strategies for the implementation of “School Health Promotion” project:

1. Concept Modification

The final target of School Health is to nurture students to acquire the integrated quality and stipulated standard. However, there are schools that are still practising the wrong education concept of “learning means to be prepared for exams”, neglecting the cultivation of the overall quality of the students. As for the teachers, whose workload and pressure do keep increasing day by day, it is difficult for them to cope with the different community activities, lectures and at the same time, to delve into the pedagogic operations. This is not healthy for both the teachers and students. Should the importance of “School Health Promotion” be well understood, the teachers will acquire the sense of satisfaction, well grasp the target of imparting to the students the integrated quality and stipulated standard, to establish a set of strategy and execute practical implementation.

2. Training for the teaching and non-teaching staff

Through training and learning, the teachers understand that they are accountable for the health of the students and will consider how they may collaborate the pedagogic activities with their health knowledge and guide their students to exert healthy practices. Furthermore, the teachers have to acquire more of the skills and knowledge of personal health. Health knowledge is the basis for the manifestation of healthy practice, and health knowledge includes the information of healthy behaviour, how to eat healthily and the minimum time for daily exercise. Learning well the health knowledge and mastering the personal health skills do not just profit the teachers themselves but also help to impart them to their students. Having a thorough and profound grasp of the knowledge through practice, co-operating with the surrounding facilities and environment, a healthy life style suitable for the individual self will gradually be established.

3. Activity Development

Teachers are the steersmen and model of learning for their students. They hold a very important weight in the students’ heart. Teachers are to lead the students to implement healthy life styles of no smoking, no alcoholic drinks, balanced diets and appropriate exercises. All these are easily seen and practised in our daily life. For example, when the eyes feel tired, try to look afar, specially where there are green plants; when buying food from the school snack counter, select the healthy items and never drink unprofitable drinks; perform exercise during recess or after school to enhance body fluid circulation, etc.

Instigate health activities in school to promote and deepen the students’ actual experience, to improve the learning outcome and to praise the healthy students who excel in morals and academic performances. All activities should be in coordination with classroom teaching to unite knowledge with actual practices. The type of activities may go in accordance with the age of the students, e.g. arrange the students to be on duty for classroom cleaning, collecting Internet information, drawing, painting, games playing, quiz competition, interclass ball games, etc. Participating in the different relevant practical activities is profitable to nourish and promote the students’ power of organizing, the cognition of self-help ability and being self-educated. Exert the appropriate utilization of the various resources of the community to transform the negative participations into the positive and optional ones. For example: for the propagation of “Tobacco Deteriorates Health” to the Primary Five students in school, it can be done by the school-stationed medical persons, in the form of seminars or courses in accordance with the actual situation of the school. In fact, not only the school-stationed medical persons, the medical personnel of the community or the relevant organizations as well, can be invited to be the speakers. This not only fully utilizes the different community activities and seminars but also lessens the burden of the teachers, improving the former situation of only some of the students may acquire the relevant knowledge.

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