
UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION TO HEALTH AND WELLBEING*

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the concept and definition of health;
- explain the perspectives of health; and
- describe the Health-Illness continuum.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Rahul and Samina are a happily married couple in their early 30s. They both work in a multi national company and are doing very well in their jobs. But despite of high income and a comfortable lifestyle, Rahul was recently diagnosed with hypertension and Type II diabetes and Samina is stressed all the time and has developed sleep problem for which she is consulting a physician.

Nirav is a ten year old boy and though he has always been on a healthier side, he has been recently diagnosed as being obese. Doctor has attributed his obesity to lack of healthy diet, (including fruits and vegetables that are rich in fibre) and to regular consumption of junk food, soft drink and sweets.

Arun was a topper throughout his school years and managed to get admission to one of the best colleges in his cities to pursue a programme

in management. During this time, he started consuming alcohol and also started smoking, that soon developed in to a habit and addiction. As a result not only his studies suffered but his relationship with his family and friends has also been negatively affected. His parents have now admitted him to a de-addiction centre to help him recover.

After loosing her mother to a terminal illness, Savita who was once a bubbly eight year old has now become secluded and lonely. She has stopped interacting with her friends and refuses to attend school. She is also not able to eat and sleep adequately. Her family doctor recommended her to a clinical psychologist who has diagnosed her with having depression.

The above examples, highlight some of the aspects of health. It can be said that health is one of the most important but most deprived aspect of our life. Nowadays, our lifestyle has become more leisure oriented, indoor, technology-centered and dependent on food such as pizza, burger, chips, cold drink, etc. In all probability, this lifestyle is damaging our health and increasing the burden of non-communicable diseases on our healthcare system. Moreover, conventional hospital treatment has been found to be inefficient in treating lifestyle-related diseases. It is thus important to focus on health and deal with it at multiple levels not only by making adequate health services available but also by encouraging healthy lifestyle amongst the individuals.

In the very first unit of this course, we will discuss about the concept and definition of health. The difference between illness, disease, and sickness will also be focused on. Further, the conceptualisation of health according to western and eastern perspectives will also be explained. The Health-Illness continuum will also be described.

1.2 CONCEPT AND DEFINITION OF HEALTH

What do you mean by health? The answer to this question is a complex one, as it holds many different meanings across time, culture, society, social class and even age groups. In this section, we will discuss the meaning of health and how it has been conceptualised among lay people, by the World Health Organisation, and among different cultures.

Many studies have been conducted to understand what common people think and understand by health. In a study done by Bauman (1961), she asked people to explain ‘what does being healthy mean for them?’ Majority of the participants reported either of the following three types of responses:

- 1) health means a ‘general sense of wellbeing.’
- 2) health is identified with ‘the absence of symptoms of disease’ and,
- 3) health can be seen in ‘the things that a person who is physically fit is able to do’.

Thus, according to layperson health has three components; feeling, symptom orientation and performance. In another study, Benyamini, Leventhal, and Leventhal (2003) found that according to 500 elderly participants, health is an ability to perform physical functions and vitality. Krause and Jay (1994) also conducted a study to understand the frame of reference for judging one’s health. They found that for older participants the frame of reference was the absence

or presence of health problems. Whereas, for the younger participants, health promoting behaviour was the frame of reference. These studies suggest that the meaning of health is very subjective and it changes with social factors and factors like age group can also play a role.

The term health has been derived from 'Hoelth', that is, an old English word that denotes 'the state or condition of being whole or sound' (Melquiades, 2015, pg. 3).

Pindar, in 5th Century BC defined health as "harmonious functioning of the organs". (Svalastog et al, 2017, pg. 431) This definition mainly focused on the physical aspect of health including the functioning of the physical organs as well as the absence of pain and experience of comfort. Hippocrates described health in relation to lifestyle of the individual and the environmental factors including climatic conditions, air quality, lifestyle habits, quality of water and food as well. The term 'positive health' was introduced by him, that focuses on diet as well as exercise (Svalastog et al, 2017).

Health has also been described in terms of a person's ability to adjust to the environmental influences. Thus, if he/ she is not able to adapt then he/ she may experience some illness or develop a disease (Svalastog et al, 2017). Most of the modern definitions define health as not mere absence of disease but an increased capacity for realisation and fulfilment of self. It has been explained as a state in which the individual is able to adequately function at physical, mental, social as well as spiritual level and is able to express his/ her potentials in the context of the environment within which he/ she exists (Svalastog et al, 2017).

In 1946, The Constitution of World Health Organisation (WHO) came up with a definition of health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". Later in its 1998 constitution, WHO again modified its definition and defined health as "a dynamic state of complete physical, mental, spiritual and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". Few points should be noted down from these definitions of health by World Health Organisation; (i) health is not equivalent to absence of disease or symptoms, (ii) health is dynamic in nature, (iii) not just your physical wellbeing but your mental, social and spiritual wellbeing are equally important and, (iv) our health is a combination of four dimensions; physical, mental, social and spiritual.

As you can see in the definition of health given by WHO, the term wellbeing has been used. Wellbeing is also known as 'Subjective Well-being' (SWB). The concept of wellbeing is closer to the concept of mental health, life satisfaction, and happiness. Wellbeing is a subjective feeling, which involves evaluation of those affective and cognitive aspects of life which are getting affected by disease and illness directly or indirectly. Often it involves evaluation of happiness, sense of contentment, sense of belongingness, achievement and being without any distress and discomfort. We will discuss about it in detail in the next unit of this course.

Other important terms related to health are 'illness', 'disease' and 'sickness'. Often used interchangeably, these three terms are used to describe the ill health of the person. However, in the scientific community, these terms are used to explain different connotations of ill health. Let us have a look at the basic definition of these terms.

Disease: This term is used by the doctors or physicians to describe the pathological (symptoms, causes etc.) and biological aspects of the health condition of his/her patients.

Illness: It refers to the general term that people use to describe their perceived deteriorated health conditions that may or may not have been yet diagnosed by a doctor. Thus, this term represents subjective experiences of the person's ill health.

Sickness: It is the societal role and perception related to illness such as taking rest, days off from work, stigma, etc.

Being healthy can be denoted not only by absence of illness but also presence of physical, mental and social wellbeing, ability of an individual to adapt well to his/ her environment. Health is also denoted by a movement towards wellbeing or wellness. Illness on the other hand can be characterised by decreased functioning in terms of physical, emotional, mental, social and spiritual aspects. Illness can be determined by presence of symptoms as well as by the diminished ability to function effectively in day to day life. It can also be determined by how the individual is feeling.

Health can be described in terms of its three domains as proposed by Dalal and Mishra (2012). They suggested the field of health broadly comprised of three domains, namely, *restoration*, *maintenance*, and *growth*. The objective of the first domain (*restoration*) is to help an individual in recovering his health from the state of illness. Thus, this domain involves all kinds of interventions that will help a patient in recovering from his illness symptoms, bodily pain, and sufferings. The second domain of health is *maintenance*, and its objective is to help people in maintaining good health and protecting them from diseases. All kinds of health-promoting behaviour such as yoga, exercise, eating good food, etc, are part of this domain. The last domain; *growth*, sees health not just in the physical terms but it considers social factors and spirituality as its parts as well. Therefore, this domain helps patients to achieve and grow in all spheres of their life.

Check Your Progress I

- 1) Define Health.

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- 2) List the three domains of health.

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1.3 CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON HEALTH

The way in which health is defined or perceived may vary based on culture. In this sub section of the unit, we will try to understand varied cross cultural perspectives on health.

Since cultural beliefs are intricately woven into the health beliefs of patients, therefore to understand any health-related behaviour it is essential to acknowledge and understand the role of culture and society first. In this section, we will discuss how western and eastern societies conceptualise health and illness. Before starting this section, first let's discuss the concept-*Karma*. Karma refers to the metaphysical principle of cause and effect. It is a belief that the accumulated effects of your deeds of last birth have an effect on the events of present life. Studies have suggested that in India patients with life-threatening chronic diseases such as AIDS, heart disease, and cancer tend to attribute the cause to karmic factors more. Whereas, in western countries very few patients attribute illness to karmic factors. What do you think, why there is a difference in their causal attribution? The reason could be 'cultural differences' in the conception of the role of Karma in life-events. This example suggests that cultural notions significantly affect our conception of health.

1.3.1 Western Perspective

Culture never remains constant. It changes with time. Therefore, cultural conception about health also changes with time. For instance, ancient Greek culture (a western civilisation) believed in the role of four humors (blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm) in our health and investigated health as a whole. Hippocrates, one of the renowned scholars of ancient Greek civilisation had described in his writings about how mind, body, and spirit are interrelated and work together to maintain our health. However, with the passage of time and especially after the Renaissance, the scientific revolution led to considerable development in the physical medicine. The explanation of the illness became more scientific and physiological based. Further, during the seventeenth century, French philosopher René Descartes's philosophies about the *dualism* of mind and body influenced contemporary and later philosophers and scholars alike. As a result of this, western medicine started considering the mind and body as entirely separate entities, and this philosophy still dominates their medical theories. This theory of dualism is responsible for the idea of viewing the human body as a machine and is known as *the reductionist* or *mechanistic viewpoint*. According to this viewpoint, we can understand our body through its constituent parts (cells, DNA, different body parts) and there is no role of concepts like mind and spirit or spirituality in one's health. The underlying assumption of Western view on health is that the cause of the illness lies outside one's body in the form of germs and bacteria. Further, its (germs and bacteria) removal will lead to the achievement of optimal health. Thus, it can be concluded that the Western system of medicine treats patients only at the physical level and thus ignoring his or her feelings, beliefs as well as cultural background. This viewpoint underpins the *medical or bio-medical model* of health and illness. We will discuss this model in detail in unit two.

1.3.2 Eastern Perspective on Health

Eastern perspective refers to the viewpoint of eastern civilisation such as India and China on health and its related issues. The basic premise of all eastern civilisations is that health is more than just an absence of disease or its symptoms. If you are healthy, then you will experience happiness, wellbeing, satisfaction with life, be able to function optimally as a member of your social community and, will be able to set goals and achieve them. Thus, you will be able to function as a whole. So, it can be suggested that the WHO definition of health supports eastern view more. In contrast to the western view, all eastern civilizations primarily view health as a whole and, not in parts. Seeing health as a whole means health is made up of many interrelated components such as physical, social, mental and spiritual, and any imbalance among them will manifest itself in the form of disease or illness. The eastern viewpoint underpins *the holistic model* of health and illness. According to the holistic model, the cause of illness does not lie outside but it is inside our body and harmony between physical, mental, social and spiritual components will lead to the state of optimal health.

1.3.3 Indian Perspective on Health

As culture plays a significant role in Indian life, it is important to understand the traditional Indian view on health. The Sanskrit word for health is *Swastha*, ‘*swa*’ means ‘inner self’ and ‘*-sth*’ means ‘conscious’. Thus, in Indian tradition, being healthy has been considered equivalent to being conscious of your inner-self (Gupta et al., 2011). Dalal and Mishra (2011) have also pointed out the inner- directedness of Indian view about health. It means the cause of all illnesses lie within ourselves and if we became conscious of our inner selves, only then, we can achieve optimal health. All traditional Indian systems like *Ayurveda* and *Siddha* consider “physical, psychological, philosophical, ethical and spiritual wellbeing of mankind” and harmony with the cosmos, nature, and science is a necessary condition for wellbeing (Ravishankar & Shukla, 2007, p. 321). Conceptualisation of health in traditional Indian system is in contrast to the contemporary bio-medical health model. Instead of only treating symptoms of the disease, all traditional Indian treatments aim to heal and improve the wellbeing of the person.

Check Your Progress II

- 1) Complete the sentences.
 - a) Ancient Greek culture believed in the role of four humors, namely

 - b) The basic premise of all eastern civilisation is that

 - c) The Sanskrit word for health is

1.4 HEALTH-ILLNESS CONTINUUM

As we have now developed an understanding of the concept of health, let us discuss about the Health-Illness continuum. Health-illness continuum was introduced by John Travis in the year 1972 and it can be explained as a graphical representation of wellness. Wellness here is not mere absence of illness but denotes healthy mental and emotional state. As can be seen in the Fig. 2.1, there are two arrows in the figure that move in opposite direction with 'neutral point' indicating the midpoint. Neutral point denotes absence of illness as well as wellness. As we move towards the left of the figure, that is, towards premature death, we can see that there are three steps, namely, signs, symptoms and disability that result in premature death, thus indicating deterioration of health ultimately leading to premature death. On the other hand, as we move towards the right of the figure, the steps are awareness, education, growth present that result in wellness. Thus, indicating increasing wellbeing or health of an individual. The figure also shows treatment paradigm that denotes that if adequate treatment is given the person can be brought back to neutral point.

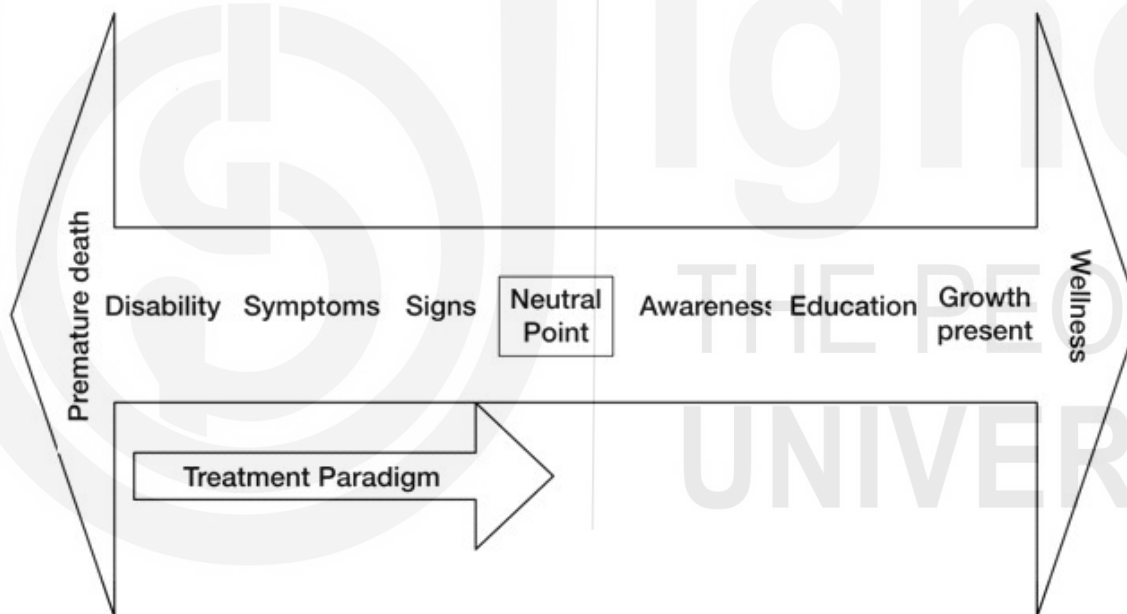


Fig. 2.1: Health-Illness continuum

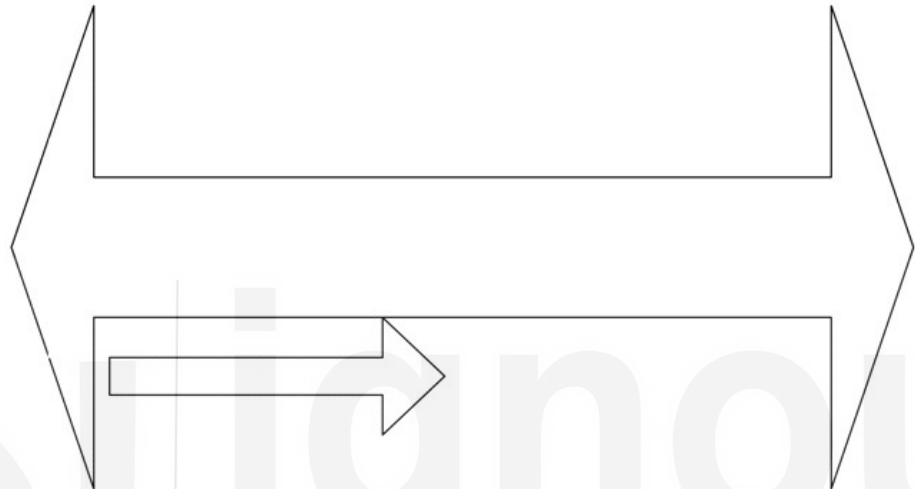
According to the Health-Illness continuum, health is dynamic. Our health moves back and forth within a continuum, with optimum health or highest health at one end and death or complete disability at the other end of this continuum. One day you may feel energetic, another might have a headache for all day long, while on the third day you may feel fine again. These situations suggest that our health never remains constant and it changes or fluctuates throughout one's life. According to this model, since our health continuously changes; therefore, our adaption or response to that change matters most as it affects our health directly. For the same stressful situation, one person might respond positively while another person might get anxious. The person who responded positively will have better health than the second one.

Check Your Progress III

1) Who introduced Health-Illness Continuum?

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2) Complete the figure of Health-Illness continuum.



1.5 LET US SUM UP

In the present unit we mainly discussed about the concept and definition of health. The term health has been derived from 'Hoelth', that is, an old English word that denotes 'the state or condition of being whole or sound'. WHO defines health as "a dynamic state of complete physical, mental, spiritual and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". The concept of wellbeing was also briefly discussed in this Unit. Wellbeing is a subjective feeling, which involves evaluation of those affective and cognitive aspects of life which are getting affected by disease and illness directly or indirectly. Other important terms related to health, namely, 'illness', 'disease' and 'sickness', were also explained. Further, the three domains of health, namely, restoration, maintenance and growth were also highlighted. The unit also covered the cross-cultural perspectives of health including the western perspective, the eastern perspectives and the Indian perspective. The Health-Illness continuum was then discussed with the help of a figure. Health-illness continuum was introduced by John Travis in the year 1972 and it can be explained as a graphical representation of wellness. In the next unit, that is, unit two, we will discuss about the various models of health and illness.

1.6 REFERENCES

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1.7 KEYWORDS

Disease: Used by doctors or physicians to describe the pathological and biological aspects of health conditions of his/her patients.

Dualism: Perspective prevalent in western societies, which states that mind and

body are two separate entities and have no connection between them.

Health: As defined by WHO, “it is a dynamic state of complete physical, mental, spiritual and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”.

Holistic model: This is the model of health and illness majorly followed by all eastern civilisations.

Illness: An individual’s experiences and descriptions of his/her ill health.

Sickness: It refers to social role and expectations associated with the patients and its caregivers.

Wellbeing: Wellbeing is a subjective feeling, which involves evaluation of those affective and cognitive aspects of life which are getting affected by disease and illness directly or indirectly.

1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

- 1) Define Health

Health is a dynamic state of complete physical, mental, spiritual and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (WHO).

- 2) List the three domains of health

The three domains of health are restoration, maintenance, and growth.

Check Your Progress II

- 1) Complete the sentences.

- a) Ancient Greek culture believed in the role of four humors, namely blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm.

- b) The basic premise of all eastern civilisation is that health is more than just an absence of disease or its symptoms.

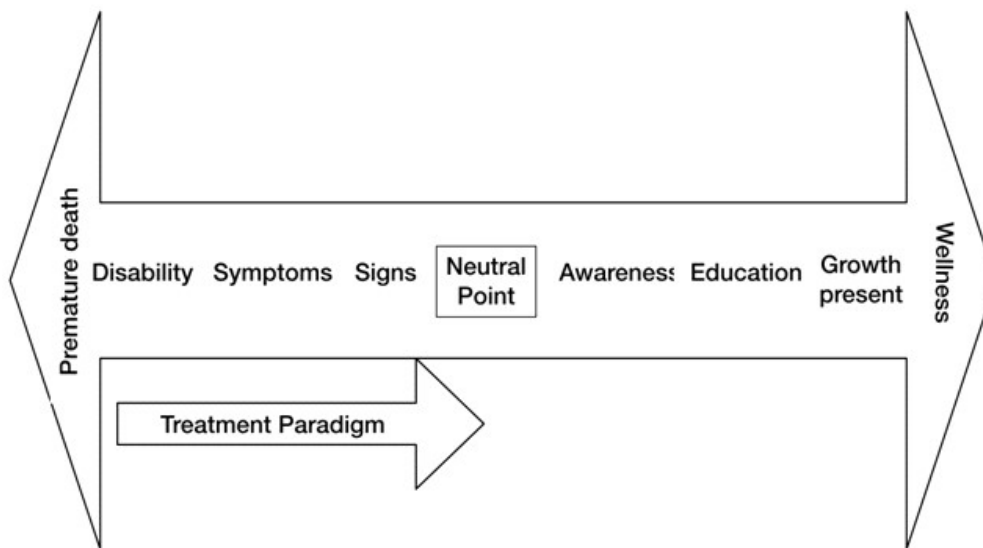
- c) The Sanskrit word for health is Swastha.

Check Your Progress III

- 1) Who introduced Health-Illness Continuum?

John Travis

- 2) Complete the figure of Health-Illness Continuum.



1.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) How is the conceptualisation of health by lay people different from conceptualisation of WHO. Explain.
- 2) Discuss the cross-cultural perspectives of health.
- 3) Write a note on Indian perspective on health.
- 4) Explain Health-Illness continuum.

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