

FROM HEALTH EDUCATION TO HEALTH PROMOTION IN ROMANIA – A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: The understanding of health determinants has shaped health promotion policies. Terms and concepts in health promotion have evolved from sanitary education to health education and health promotion. The paper presents a review of the literature with the purpose of identifying the historical milestones of health promotion in Romania. First notions about hygiene were brought in the Romanian Provinces together with the medical Enlightenment during the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries. Health education starts during the XIXth Century and was done systematically through the publication of books, journals and brochures or through medical conferences. During the communist period, Romania introduced a centralized health education system (one of the first in Europe). After 1989, our country has assimilated all paradigm shifts in health legislation incorporating prevention measures for health education and health promotion. In conclusion we can say that at conceptual level, Romanian health system has incorporated modern concepts of health promotion.

Cuvinte cheie: educație pentru sănătate, promovarea sănătății, istoria medicinei

Rezumat: Înțelegerea determinismului complex al sănătății a influențat evoluția politicilor de promovare a sănătății. De-a lungul istoriei s-a vorbit pe rând despre educație sanitară, educație pentru sănătate și în prezent despre promovarea sănătății. Lucrarea reprezintă o recenzie a literaturii de specialitate privind principalele repere din dezvoltarea promovării sănătății în România. Noțiunile de igienă sanitară au pătruns în provinciile române încă din perioada iluminismului medical, secolele XVII-XVIII. Educația sanitară s-a făcut în mod sistematic din secolul al XIX-lea, prin publicarea de cărți și broșuri informative sau conferințe publice. În secolul XX, România a avut un sistem centralizat de educație sanitară (printre puținele în Europa) care a diseminat cunoștințe medicale către populație. După 1989, România a asimilat toate schimbările de paradigmă în modul de abordare a prevenției încorporând în sistemul legislativ măsuri de educație pentru sănătate și de promovare a sănătății. În concluzie se poate afirma că la nivel conceptual sistemul de sănătate din România a înglobat conceptele moderne de promovare a sănătății.

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of concepts from health education to health promotion has had a long way during centuries, closely linked with historical realities and the development of health care systems. Health education and health promotion are perceived as similar, but in reality they represent different concepts. Health education represents the delivery of medical knowledge to individuals, or groups, so they are able to change voluntarily, certain behaviours, usually at risk. Health promotion is a concept first defined by the World Health Organization as the process that allows people to control health determinants and to improve their health.(1) Health promotion implies political and environmental actions and the implementation of adequate and focused health care policies.(2)

PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to identify the most important moments of the evolution of health promotion in Romania from the unsystematic forms of health education to health promotion programs of today.

METHODS

The article represents a critical review of literature

from the Digital Library of Bucharest and from the Library of History of Medicine from “Carol Davila” University of Medicine Bucharest and other specialty publications.

RESULTS

In the early XIXth century, Romanian population was mainly affected by diseases due to poverty and improper sanitation. The lack of knowledge about diseases and the reluctance in the application of preventive measures needed to be addressed by specific education. This is what doctors and literate people have done in those times.

Publication of health education materials is to be mentioned in all Romanian provinces. In Transylvania, there was a circulation of leaflets and brochures, elaborated and disseminated by the military administration. One example is: “Information about the cure of syphilis” published in Sibiu in 1803.(3)

In the same year, Vasile Aaron (1770-1822) writes the first book against alcohol abuse in rimes known as “Speech in rimes and jokes between the drunk Leonat and his wife Dorofata”.

In 1824, the doctor Stefan V. Episcopescu (1777-1850) publishes in Bucharest the book: “Means and remedies of

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healing plague". He was considered the first author of educational materials from Țara Românească. In 1827, the doctor N. Kiriacopol publishes "Twelve teachings for pregnant women during and after birth". In 1843-1845, M. Kogălniceanu, a Romanian politician, publishes articles about hygiene in the pages of a calendar.(3)

Between 1891-1897, the journal "The Health Defender" (1850-1910) is published twice a month under the coordination of the prestigious ophthalmologist Nicolae Manolescu (1850-1910). From its content, we can mention accessible explanations about physiology, about germs and their ways of action, rules of personal and general hygiene, natural remedies. The journal had around 4000 subscriptions a year.(3) Other significant journals were "Albina Moldovei", "The Journal of Naturalist Doctors from Moldova" (1851), "The Teacher of the Village" (1843).

Public conferences on health education topics were also used to spread information. A remarkable contribution in this direction came from dr. Carol Davila and dr. Victor Babes. Systematic orientation toward health promotion appeared only with modern sanitary laws (1874). These laws became the framework for the development of specific sanitary structures capable of controlling epidemics.

Romanian politicians have also understood the importance of health education. At the same time with the introduction of the Sanitary Law in 1990, the Prime Minister, I.C. Bratianu, gives the doctors the important role as health educators. Quoting the philosopher H. Spencer he said that "the doctor of the future will be the teacher of the nation".(4)

This law brought public hygiene measures implementation, but also the recognition of the role as health educator of the local general physician - which provides the access to health care facilities.

The 1930 sanitary law has initiated the foundation of the institutes of applied sciences. The institutes are the first methodological bodies for health prevention in Romania. Their role is to perform scientific research and inquiries regarding the health of the population, to propose health promotion measures and to coordinate their application. They were also responsible for organize the training courses in the field of prevention. The newly founded institutes were the Institute of Serums and Vaccines Dr Ion Cantacuzino (founded 16.07.1921), the Institute of Hygiene and Public Health (26.02.1927).

In 1948, during the communist period, the Ministry of Health created a department for documentation, press and propaganda.(5) It organized regional conferences on health education with the participation of researchers from the Institutes of Hygiene, members of the Red Cross, leaders of sanitary institutions. During these meetings, it was decided to found a Central Commission for sanitary education with regional commissions and also to form scientific teams for health propaganda at local administrative level. The purpose of these decisions was the improvement of mass sanitary instruction. The technical body for these activities was called Sanepid (Ordinance 37/1951).

The idea of increasing access of the working class to health education led to the foundation of Houses for Sanitary Education (1952). It has replaced for a while the activity of sanitary education departments form Sanepid but only till 1958. Between 1958-1965, the sanitary departments had difficulties in getting financial support, therefore the activities of sanitary education were continued by the Red Cross. The Red Cross had a medical and social department and hired doctors trained for sanitary education.

In 1966, during the Congress of the Communist Party, it was launched the first five-year plan for sanitary education.

After 1989, the health promotion is still under the responsibility of the Ministry of Health through the Departments of Health Promotion from the County Health Authorities. The Centre for Health Promotion and Health Education was founded in 1992. It is the methodological body for health promotion, coordinating the activity of departments from local Health Authorities. After 2006, this centre became a department of the National School of Public Health and Management from Bucharest. It has produced strategies for health promotion and health education derived from specific studies on population health. It develops continuing medical education programmes and educational campaigns for population.

The Institute of Public Health has also a department for health promotion, the National Centre for Evaluation and Health Promotion. It also plays a part in providing assistance for the Ministry of Health in drawing specific legislation on public health. It also develops specific projects on health education and health promotion.

In 2004, Romania has launched the National Strategy of Public Health in accordance with the principles of Health for All in the XXIth century (WHO 1998). The priority domains are communicable and non-communicable diseases, mental health and preventive services.

Today, in our country, there is a wide range of nongovernmental organizations developing health promotion activities in different areas of needs (alcohol and drug abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, contraception).

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The first medical notions about hygiene have entered the Romanian Provinces in the époque of medical Enlightenment in the XVII – XVIIIth centuries. The scientific approach of disease prevention starts only in the XIXth century. Health education was understood as an important mean of preventing diseases. Therefore, we can signal an intense publishing activity of health education materials during that time. The XXth century is to be remarked through the initiation of modern sanitary laws and the foundation of sanitary structures with roles in health promotion conceptualization. The transition from sanitary education to health promotion is due to the understanding that health is determined by multiple factors comprising biological, social, environment or related to health system. Health maintenance is a complex process involving the participation of individuals and the entire society.

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