



HOLISTIC PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

POLICY 2011

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THE PRINCIPLES OF HOLISTIC PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

The principles of Holistic Primary Health Care (HPHC) are a unification of four of the most important international declarations to have emerged in the modern era, presented in a manner which summarises this declaration's vision of the interdependence of human rights, community health, ecological harmony, and the necessity of multi-sectoral integrative approaches to world health.

Our vision of the interdependence of human rights, community health, ecological harmony, and the necessity of multi-sectoral integrative approaches to world health.

HPHC is built upon the following three pillars:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) - which upholds the rights of the individual in relation to health.
- The Alma Ata Declaration of Primary Health Care (1978) – which upholds the rights of communities in relation to health.
- The Earth Charter (2000) – which upholds the rights and importance of the environment in relation to health.

And rests upon the following platform:

- The Beijing Declaration on Traditional Medicine (2008) – which upholds the value of holistic medical practices from around the globe and the necessity for them to work in an integrated fashion with existing healthcare services.

The Humanitarian, and first pillar of HPHC asserts the following rights:

- That the provision of healthcare should do no harm
- That health is a basic and inalienable right of life
- That health entails and requires the right of access to education

The Healthcare and central pillar of HPHC asserts the following principles:

- The provision of healthcare should be community oriented
- Healthcare strategies should be positive, preventative and promotive.
- Adequate Healthcare entails a strong nutritional emphasis

The ecological and final pillar of HPHC asserts the following values:

- An ecologically informed model
- A view towards sustainable initiatives
- A precautionary approach

The integrative platform of traditional, indigenous and holistic medicine asserts the following approach:

- Healthcare should entail an integrative approach that recognizes the value of appropriately used traditional and holistic interventions and knowledge

PREAMBLE

The principles espoused in this document are not new, being sourced in some of the greatest international declarations of the twentieth century. What is new is the growing awareness of the interdependence of human rights, ecological harmony and community health; thus the interweaving of rights, principles and values in a single broad integrative approach to global health.

This unifying vision compels us to take a broad and holistic view; a view that incorporates spheres of action and thought previously deemed to be unrelated. In synthesizing these perspectives we come full circle, rediscovering the values and approach of so many traditional cultures. The necessity of an integrative approach to global health is therefore of paramount importance.

The breadth and width of the many disciplines that must work together however, goes far beyond the simple dichotomy of orthodox and alternative medical practices, drawing upon the skills and knowledge of every sphere of human activity from economics to ecology, and from politics to psychology. As with each of the international declarations that this document draws together, the vision here upheld is one of universal responsibility; extending the duty of care to all of humanity in such a way that each individual becomes an active custodian for the entire biosphere of which we are a part.

It is in this spirit that we strive to realise at last our shared dream of 'health for all'.

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THE FIRST PILLAR – THE RIGHTS BASED APPROACH TO HEALTHCARE

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) represents the first global expression of the rights to which all human beings are entitled to and is based upon a deep '*recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world*'. (Preamble 1#) A rights based approach in general, and the right to safe, harmless and educational healthcare in particular are therefore upheld as the primary pillars of a holistic approach to primary health care.

That the provision of healthcare should do no harm

"*To first do no harm*", is the foundation stone of HPHC and all work that seeks to return and maintain health in its broadest sense and is implicitly affirmed in articles 1, 3 and 5 of the UDHR. The highest ideal of health care is therefore stated to be the gentle and permanent restoration of health, in the most harmless way possible, together with its ongoing and sustained safeguarding for future generations. Care and respect in response to the fragility and sanctity of all life is seen as the guiding principle against which all health care interventions and initiatives must be carefully weighed. These sentiments are echoed in article six of the Earth Charter which affirms the centrality of the prevention of harm.

That health is a basic and inalienable right

Article 25 of the UDHR states that everyone has the right to medical care to a standard adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family. The ideal of human beings enjoying 'freedom from fear and want' as attested by the UDHR can only be achieved if conditions are created that restore, sustain and protect health in its broadest sense. A rights based approach to health care also strongly emphasizes the importance of equality of access, and insures that those with greatest need are able to participate in quality health care programs.

That health entails and requires the right of access to education

Article 26 of the UDHR states that '*everyone has the right to education*'. Subsequent international covenants have made explicit the intimate relationship between education and health, with Article 12 of the U.N. International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966) calling for the creation of conditions which would assure health services, which includes education. The achievement of our common goals and the upholding of universal human rights cannot be achieved whilst basic health care knowledge is absent in the general population. It is in this light that HPHC asserts the absolute necessity of an educational component to all health care initiatives.

THE SECOND PILLAR – THE PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY HEALTH

The Declaration of Alma-Ata (1978), adopted at the First International Conference on Primary Health Care is where the Primary Health Care (PHC) model was first codified. It expressed the need “to extend the first level of the health system from sick care to the development of health” and emphasized the importance of community involvement. The creation of health, as defined by the WHO, through community focused programs as espoused by the Alma Ata Declaration is therefore the central pillar of a holistic approach to primary health care.

The provision of healthcare should be community oriented

Following on from the Alma Ata Declaration, the WHO’s Ottawa Charter of Health Promotion (1986) acknowledged “people as the main health resource supporting and enabling them to keep themselves, their families and friends healthy and to accept the community as the essential voice in matters of its health, living conditions and wellbeing”. HPHC is hereby affirmed as a community based model intended to be implemented in conjunction with those whom it pertains to. For since health is ‘of the people’ it is of paramount importance that provisions for its care are directed, implemented and overseen in close consultation with the community at large. Health care workers are therefore entrusted with the task of education and dissemination of knowledge to ensure individual and community empowerment. Individuals and community groups are consequently vested with the responsibility, education and power to actively participate in the governance of their health care.

Healthcare strategies should be positive, preventative and promotive

The Alma Ata Declaration established that the PHC model “seeks to protect and promote the health of defined communities and to address individual problems and populates health at an early stage.” In viewing health as a dynamic state of individual and collective equilibrium, this document reaffirms the WHO’s definition as more than simply the absence of the signs and symptoms of disease, and strongly urges that it must be positively engaged. A preference for strategies that actively promote a state of health and sustained healthful ways of being must therefore be used to guide all initiatives and interventions. In turn, prevention of the arising of disease in its broadest sense, is thus seen as an equal imperative for all individual and collective health care programs, with appropriate educational, nutritional, socio-economic and ecological measures accompanying the majority of treatment protocols.

Adequate Healthcare entails a strong nutritional and lifestyle emphasis

Given the almost universal acceptance of nutritional and lifestyle considerations in the role of disease as attested by their inclusion in every major health policy from Alma Ata to the Millennium Development Goals, HPHC seeks to re-emphasize such primary determinants in all health care initiatives. Included under the umbrella of Lifestyle considerations must be their societal equivalents of public hygiene and sanitation, and their respective demands for water and air that is free from contamination and disease causation. Great care must therefore be made to avoid medical intervention and palliative measures that are unaccompanied by long term educational and social health strategies when the cause of disease lays squarely in defective nutrition and poor lifestyle choices.

THE THIRD PILLAR – THE VALUES OF ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY

The Earth Charter was a United Nations initiative that was finalized and then launched as a people's charter before being approved at UNESCO headquarters in Paris in March 2000. The purpose of this charter was “*to inspire in all peoples a sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the well-being of the human family, the greater community of life, and future generations.*” As the creation of health at an individual and community level is inseparable from the creation of healthy global ecologies, the values of ecological sustainability form the third pillar of a holistic approach to primary health care*.

An ecologically informed model

The study of ecology is the study of the relation of living organisms to each other and their surroundings and highlights the interdependence and interconnection of seemingly disparate phenomenon within the broader system in which they are placed. Similarly, a holistic approach to primary health care must not only acknowledge the link between health and the total environment in which it is either sustained or destroyed, but also seek to approach human ecologies, both individual and collective, with the same deep recognition of their complex and dynamic nature that we have come to view other naturally occurring eco-systems. The integrative vision of this document, like that of the Earth Charter, thus draws many diverse concepts together into a synthesis that is itself representative of an ecologically informed approach.

A view towards sustainable initiatives

Like the Earth Charter, HPHC is “*centrally concerned with the transition to sustainable ways of living*” which includes a view towards sustainable healthcare programs. The need for sustainability was also attested to at Alma Ata and Ottawa with the PHC model strongly and repeatedly emphasizing that healthcare services must be implemented and maintained “*at a cost that the community and country can afford to maintain at every stage of their development in the spirit of self reliance and self-determination*”. Holistic healthcare programs, at both an individual and global level, must therefore emphasize a view towards sustainability by aiming to return homeostasis and facilitating increased levels of self sufficiency.

A precautionary approach

The Earth Charter contains an aphorism of great relevance for healthcare which states that ‘*when knowledge is limited apply a precautionary approach*’. As knowledge is so very often limited within healthcare a precautionary approach is elevated to a guiding and central value in the HPHC model. Such an approach must necessarily seek the safest, least invasive and gentlest intervention possible to completely and effectively restore health. This is based upon a deep recognition of the delicate balance of all naturally occurring systems, including human health and addresses the “*cumulative, long-term, indirect, long distance, and global consequences*” the earth charter urges us to consider in every decision making policy.

**At the same time, the environment continues to be an important contributing factor to disease and mortality, where 23% of all deaths globally can be attributed to environmental risk factors like sanitation, disease vectors, accidents and air pollution. Among children, they account for up to 36% of global deaths. United Nations University International Institute for Global Health Communication 19/02/11*

THE PLATFORM – AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH

In 2008, on the 60th anniversary of the Alma Ata Declaration on PHC which first highlighted the value of holistic and traditional healthcare practices, the WHO issued its historic Beijing Declaration at the first International Congress on Traditional Medicine. The declaration formally called upon all governments to integrate holistic and Traditional Medicine (TM) into their national health care system, acknowledging that it has played an important role in meeting the demands of primary health care in many developing countries and is already widely utilized in many developed countries. At this congress, WHO Director-General Dr Margaret Chan addressed the delegates with the following statement:

“The two systems of traditional (including Complimentary and Alternative Medical (CAM) therapies) and Western medicine need not clash. Within the context of primary health care, they can blend together in a beneficial harmony, using the best features of each system, and compensating for certain weaknesses in each”.

This document, which like the Alma Ata Declaration, defines primary health care as ‘essential health care’, explicitly affirms the essential nature of appropriately used holistic medical practices. Primary health care should therefore entail an integrative approach that recognizes the value of holistic and traditional interventions and knowledge, for in the words of Dr Chan:

“The time has never been better, and the reasons never greater, for giving traditional medicine its proper place in addressing the many ills that face all our modern – and our traditional – societies”.

As stated in the preamble however, the scope of cooperation and integration required goes well beyond that of the above differing medical approaches. Rather, it encompasses the vast array of skills and knowledge required to build economically vibrant communities of healthy, educated individuals that are sustainably living in harmony with each other and their broader environment. An integrative, cooperative, multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral approach to global health is therefore affirmed as the platform upon which all initiatives must be based.

Finally, acknowledgment is here explicitly given to the inseparability of traditional medical systems and the rights of indigenous peoples. The continuum that exists between CAM therapies as they are titled in more technologically developed countries, and TM practices as many of the same therapies are titled in technologically developing countries is clear. By upholding the Beijing Declaration and an integrative approach to medicine, the rights of indigenous peoples specifically, and the cultural diversity of humankind more generally, are further affirmed and upheld.

End Notes and References.