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Building Healthy Communities through Physical Education: A Public Health Approach



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Abstract. There is an alarming trend in the shift of changing lifestyle changes due to rapid urbanization and modernization. The socio-behavioral risk factors e.g., unhealthy diet, tobacco use, sedentary lifestyles are common characteristics of developing countries who is facing the economic transition and is affecting the health of its nation. Based on the Malaysian National Health and Morbidity Study 2011, prevalence of overweight and obesity (over 18 years old) increased from 29.2% (2006) to 29.4% and from 14.0% (2006) to 15.1% respectively. Prevalence of abdominal obesity is 54.1% (females) and 34.1% (males). Based on WHO data, insufficient physical activity contributes to 3.2 million deaths and 69.3 million DALYs each year. People who are insufficiently inactive have a 20% to 30% risk of all-cause mortality. Physical inactivity will lead to poor health outcomes and can cause non-communicable diseases, such as heart disease and stroke, diabetes, cancers, other chronic diseases and depression. More behavioral change activities are warranted to increase recreational physical activity. The community can play a great role in promoting physical activities via community participation and inclusion, a holistic physical education program, diversity, responsiveness and sustainability. Advocating a healthy lifestyle through physical education and health promotion campaigns, mass media and support groups is deemed necessary and further research is needed to develop more innovative preventive health strategies in building healthy communities.

Biography. Dr. Low Wah Yun, PhD, AFBPsS, FBCP, CPsychol., is Professor of Psychology and Head of the Research Management Center, Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. She graduated with a BA (Hons) from the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and subsequently obtained both her MSc and PhD in Medical Psychology from the University of Surrey, England. Prof Low is actively engaged in teaching, research, service and consultancy. Her main areas of research work and interest revolves around behavioral sciences, psycho-socio aspects of health and illness, sexual and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, men's health and aging. She is a strong advocate on healthy living. She has served as a consultant for the both local and international organizations on her research interests. Prof Low is a member of many learned societies. She is the Vice-President of the Asia Pacific Academic Consortium for Public Health (APACPH), Fellow of the British Society for Clinical Hypnotherapy, Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society, President of the Malaysian Association for Scientific Research in Psychiatry, member of the Malaysian Psychological Association, member of the International Federation of Psychiatric

Epidemiology and also a member of the World Society on Biological Psychiatry. She has published over 200 articles in peer-reviewed journals and co-authored 20 books and book chapters. Currently, Prof Low is the Editor-in-Chief of the Asia-Pacific Journal of Public Health (www.apjph.sagepub.com)