

School Health, an Important Issue in the New Millennium

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Worldwide, numerous aspects of students' current behaviors negatively impact their health. Such behaviors include nutrition, physical activities and leisure time (1). Schools can have a major influence on compromising these issues. Our children and adolescents spend the majority of their active time in school. This is a unique opportunity for the health system to promote the health of not only the youth but also their parents, teachers and other school personnel. On the other side, healthy students have better academic performance and learning skills. Thus there is a bilateral relation between education and health for which both are the basis for improvement. In 1995, the World Health Organization launched the Global School Health Initiative. The purpose of this initiative was to mobilize and strengthen health promotion and education activities at local, national, regional and global levels. The Initiative has targeted students, school personnel, families and other members of the community through increasing the numbers of health promoting schools. Although there is a debate regarding the definition of a health promoting school, the concept includes constant strengthening capacity of the school as a healthy setting for living, learning and working (2). Despite the recognition of the importance of school health and many initiatives in different countries, in reality, there was limited success (3). Indeed the rate of tobacco use, substance abuse, unintentional injury and violence, unhealthy nutritional behavior, physical inactivity and even sexually transmitted diseases have increased worldwide among adolescents (4, 5). For example, in the majority of countries the numbers of obese students tripled in the past 20 years (6). Many vertical programs, despite their initial success, have not been sustainable and in some cases they were detrimental to other aspects of health. Ignorance of the basis for childhood and adolescent behaviors and the way they adopt unhealthy

behavior is a major obstacle in the formation of effective policies and programs for health promotion among youth. Mental and social aspects of health are not well addressed in many of these programs. There is still a lack of data on many aspects of school health. Time trends of the risks are not recognized on a timely manner and challenges are seen only years after they have induced their negative effects.

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