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1st workshop on the exchange of experience in physical activity and sports promotion in children and adolescents

Report of a Hepa Europe Meeting held in Magglingen,
Switzerland, 22-23 November 2006
in co-operation with FOSPO and FOPH



Co-sponsored by WHO Regional Office for Europe



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Executive summary

The 1st workshop on the exchange of experience in physical activity and sports promotion in children and adolescents was held at the Federal Office of Sports in Magglingen, Switzerland on November 22 and 23, 2006. Twenty-eight participants from 10 different countries attended one or both days of this meeting. The aim of the workshop was to set a starting point in sharing experiences and developing joint European initiatives to promote physical activity among young people more effectively. Ten speakers from 7 different countries presented a range of interventions and approaches to physical activity promotion among children and adolescents. They stimulated discussions on issues emerging in this field, which were collated during the general discussion at the end of day 1.

On the second day, a work group to be integrated into the HEPA Europe network was formed. This group will be discussing joint projects such as the set up of a framework, which allows professionals from different countries to share their experiences and learn from each other. The work group will also organise the 2nd workshop of this kind in 2007, and will inform a wider group of interested professionals (all participants of the 1st workshop) about planned activities and possible input needed.

The final three presentations of the workshop focused on the assessment of physical activity and fitness among children and adolescents and were followed by a general discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of various monitoring techniques.

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Introduction

The extraordinary importance of regular physical activity and exercise for disease prevention and health promotion is widely accepted. There is consensus that the origins of chronic diseases which normally manifest during adulthood lie in childhood.

However, in many European countries physical activity decreases with increasing age among children and adolescents and results in a substantial proportion of inactive adults among the European societies. Therefore, an increasing focus has been put on physical activity promotion among children and adolescents. This subject will be a key issue for future activities in the European network for the promotion of health-enhancing physical activity, HEPA Europe (www.euro.who.int/hepa).

The purpose of this workshop was to present effective approaches to promote physical activity in this age group and to identify transferable and promising elements. Furthermore, current possibilities for monitoring physical activity behaviour among children were presented.

This meeting of European researchers and experts in the field served as a start for further joint projects and activities, which will be coordinated by a newly formed work group within the HEPA Europe network.

Wednesday, November 22, 2006

Presentations (Interventions, national and international approaches)

The aim of Wednesday's presentations was to share experiences of interventions carried out with children and adolescents in several European countries. Abstracts of each presentation can be found in the Book of Abstracts, which was distributed at the workshop and is also available on the Internet (www.hepa.ch/workshop). Furthermore, the power point documents for several of these presentations are published on the same website. The following presentations were given:

- Good health - One of education's most important goals - Johan Tranquist, Sweden
- Young Finland: Sports Adventure around the Globe - Pekka Oja, Finland
- Approach of the Netherlands - Marijke Chin A Paw, The Netherlands
- Youth and Sport in Switzerland - David Egli, Switzerland
- WHO Europe's Children's Health and Environment Programme's Contribution to the Promotion of Physical Activity for Children - Sonja Kahlmeier, Italy
- WHO European Childhood Obesity Surveillance - Trudy Wijnhoven, Denmark
- Development and evaluation of a physical activity program for kindergarten children for the improvement of cognitive abilities - Julia Everke, Germany
- Physical activity promotion through accelerometer feedback and computer tailored advice: Feasibility and effectiveness among Dutch adolescents - Marijke Chin A Paw, The Netherlands
- Positive short-term effects of school-based weight gain prevention among adolescents - Amika Singh, The Netherlands
- Exercise training program in obese children: from randomized controlled trial to its application in the community - Nathalie Farpour-Lambert, Switzerland

General Discussion: Involving sports clubs and schools in physical activity promotion

The general discussion at the end of the first day and at the beginning of day 2 aimed to bring together insights from the presentations given and discussions held thereafter. The focus of the general discussion was the question of how sports clubs as well as school could be involved most effectively in physical activity promotion for children and adolescents.

The following issues were discussed around the involvement of sports clubs in physical activity promotion:

- There is a lot of potential to involve children in sports for all
- Obstacles are found in the traditional focus on competitive sports that is predominant in a lot of sports associations
- A common ground has to be found between health promoters and sports coaches/club managers to realise this potential
- Drop-out from sports at age 12 onwards needs to be prevented
- Associations have to take this on board not just individual clubs
- Co-operation with the schools to reach all children is important

- Offer programmes that allow children to try out various sports
- Facilitate change of sports discipline
- Modify traditional sports forms (including times of training/competition)
- Foster participants' skills to organise sports by themselves
- Address the problem of volunteers dropping out of clubs (coaches/administrators etc.)
- Think about how we, as health professionals, can provide help for sports clubs rather than just expecting them to change
- Think of simple strategies which can make a big change, e.g. encourage development of smaller teams, so that a sport can be played with less people participating
- Set a political foundation for sports for all, e.g. „a handshake with sports“ in Sweden

Concerning the involvement of schools in physical activity promotion, the following main issues emerged:

- Schools are a good setting to reach the disadvantaged target groups that are otherwise hard to recruit
- The school in the broader sense has a high potential for PA promotion: Amount and quality of PE, active commuting to school, optional schools sports, after school care on the school compounds
- Staff at schools are expected to implement a range of different programmes and therefore any school approach needs to make sure it does not become a burden to the school
- Focus on after school sports as the school day is already full
- Join up forces with the community to maximise use of the few resources available
- Promote PA with minority groups, e.g. Jump-in programme (Holland)
- Offer lunch time and after school PA programmes at school, e.g. programmes of the Young Finland Association
- Emphasise benefits of co-operation with sports clubs to the schools
- Address the curriculum, adjust PE lessons more to the needs of the children, examine the objectives of PE lessons
- Integrate PA into other subjects as well like excursions to the forest etc.
- Promote multidisciplinary PA through school projects (e.g. circus, theatre)
- Consider liability problems
- Parents' concerns need to be considered: work on policy level to reassure parents
- Get the critical mass of parents to support active commuting and turn the trend

It was concluded that both settings, schools and sports clubs, have a potential to support physical activity promotion, which has not been fully realised yet. Different countries are at different stages in the process of joining hands with representatives from schools and sports clubs to promote health enhancing physical activity. A collection of examples how this co-operation has been put into practice from various countries would therefore help all professionals in planning further activities.

Thursday, November 23, 2006

Plenary: HEPA Europe work group: Experiences in physical activity and sports promotion in children

HEPA Europe (<http://www.euro.who.int/hepa>) has to date 37 members, mainly institutions. There is no membership fee. Voluntary contributions have been made and are appreciated. What is expected is that members meet the costs of attending the meetings and conferences. The report of the last annual HEPA Europe meeting in June 2006 in Tampere (Finland) can be found on the website (http://www.euro.who.int/hepa/meetings/20050907_1). A number of work groups on specific topics have been formed through HEPA Europe, being groups of experts who consult on scientific evidence and work on specific tasks.

It was suggested that a new work group be set up with the aim of exchanging knowledge and experience to make progress in the area of PA promotion for children. More specific aims would then be defined by the group itself. The emphasis would be more on implementation of programmes than pure research.

It was then proposed that this work group should be set up and should contain two circles. An inner circle consists of a number of members who monitor the activities of the group. A wider circle of professionals are on the mailing list and thus being kept informed and can be consulted for specific tasks at specific times. The wider circle encompasses every one who has attended this first meeting in Magglingen. Any person who knows other professionals to be included on the mailing list can forward their contact details to Christoph Nützi. Any person who does not want to be included can communicate this to Christoph as well. It is hoped that people who become part of this work group will also join the HEPA Europe network, if their institution is not already a member.

Products of the work groups are for example activity reports. HEPA Europe can provide support of frameworks and some secretarial support to help the group. A first aim of the work group on PA with children will be to produce a report or database about activities in PA with children and adolescents focusing on national approaches or projects which are being developed and have the potential to become national campaigns. It is not expected that the members of the work group produce this report themselves, but they could specify the approach to be taken and then mandate a person to take on the task of collecting the information, with people in the work group providing expertise and support. The next annual HEPA Europe meeting will be conducted in Graz (Austria) from May 16 to 18, it is hoped that the work group on PA and children could then present what stage they are at with their planning and what aims have been set for the future.

It was decided that workshops on PA promotion for children like this first one here in Magglingen are to be conducted on a yearly basis. To organise the next workshop in 2007 the following group will meet:
Johan Tranquist, Narcis Gusi, Marijke Chin A Paw and Christoph Nützi.

Presentations (Monitoring)

The aim of Thursday's presentations was to share experiences with the assessment of physical activity and fitness among young people. Abstracts of these three presentations can be found in the Book of Abstracts, which was distributed at the workshop and is also available on the Internet (www.hepa.ch/workshop). Furthermore, the power point documents for two of these presentations are also published on this website. The following presentations were given:

- Assessment of physical activity and fitness in population-based studies: Striking the optimal balance between feasibility and validity - Søren Brage, United Kingdom
- Physical activity, fitness and cardiovascular disease risk factors in young people - Jonatan R Ruiz, Sweden
- The Swiss Sport Observatory - Brian Martin, Switzerland

Final Plenary: monitoring physical activity behaviour of children

It was discussed that both the testing of fitness levels and the measurement of physical activity behaviour have their place in monitoring PA in children.

Fitness testing is more objective and can capture other aspects in addition to cardiovascular fitness, such as strength or co-ordination skills. It is to be noted, however, that genetic factors determine fitness to a great extent which may be even more predominant in children than in adults. Feasibility is an issue to be considered with fitness testing. Test batteries for health-related fitness have been developed, for instance at the UKK institute. More research is needed to develop feasible and relevant test batteries for children. Unfortunately, results of fitness tests often also depend on a person's motivation to perform well on the test.

A range of health effects, including social or psychological aspects, can occur even if physical activity participation has not made an impact on fitness. Therefore it is important that physical activity also be measured in projects focusing on health promotion. A questionnaire on PA for children might need to include questions on structured exercise, active transport, activity at home or around the home and measures of inactivity (sitting time, TV etc.). Positive experiences have also been made with questions where children or their parents had to rank their own PA level in comparison to their peers. Questionnaires need to be adapted to each age group, e.g. for younger children "being outside during leisure time" and "active transport" may cover the largest part of PA behaviour while for adolescents spending time outside is less relevant to PA. Ideally questionnaires are to be accompanied by objective measures such as accelerometers. With current devices available, problems with compliance prevail. Technical development leading to smaller, lighter devices, which may even be integrated in T-shirts or other clothing, should provide help in the years to come.

Care has to be taken to avoid stigmatisation of children who perform less well. Information gathering, especially for fitness tests, thus needs to be planned in a way that does not single out children. In addition, the feedback to children and parents on data gathered needs to be planned carefully. A further aspect that is important to both, fitness testing and PA measurement is standardisation of the tools. Various professionals are often involved in data gathering and therefore, it is important that they all use the tools provided in the same way.

List of Participants

Braun Charlotte **University of Basel, Switzerland**
Brage Søren **Medical Research Council Epidemiology Unit, United Kingdom**
Chin A Paw Marijke **VU University Medical Center, The Netherlands**
Dössegger Alain **Federal Institute of Sports, Switzerland**
Egli David **Federal Institute of Sports, Switzerland**
Everke Julia **Universität Konstanz, Germany**
Farpour-Lambert Nathalie **Hôpitaux Universitaires de Genève, Switzerland**
Gusi Narcis **University of Extremadura, Spain**
Jimmy Gerda **Federal Institute of Sports, Switzerland**
Jeker Martin **Federal Institute of Sports, Switzerland**
Kahlmeier Sonja **WHO Regional Office for Europe, Italy**
Kriemler Susi **Universität Basel, Switzerland**
Mäder Urs **Federal Institute of Sports, Switzerland**
Mahler Per **Service de santé de la Jeunesse, Switzerland**
Martin Brian **Federal Institute of Sports, Switzerland**
Mengisen Walter **Federal Office and Institute of Sports, Switzerland**
Nützi Christoph **Federal Office of Sports, Switzerland**
Oja Pekka **UKK Institute, Finland**
Puder Jardena **CHUV, Switzerland**
Ruch Nicole **Federal Institute of Sports, Switzerland**
Ruiz Jonatan R **Karolinska Institutet, Sweden**
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Slachta Radim **Palacky University, Czech Republic**
Stierlin Max **Federal Institute of Sports, Switzerland**
Tranquist Johan **National Center for Child Health Promotion (NCFH), Sweden**
Ursprung Lorenz **Federal Office of Sports, Switzerland**
Wijnhoven Trudy **World Health Organization, Denmark**
Zahner Lukas **Universität Basel, Switzerland**