

PROMOTING A SPORTING LIFESTYLE

BY

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1.0 Introduction

Sport is a critical component of wellness. It is a very common and wide practical entity that is utilized across the spectrum of society in the promotion of health. Today there is a prevalence of diseases like cerebrovascular, pulmonary disorders, and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases just to mention a few, that are associated with choosing a negative lifestyle. A sporting lifestyle is a positive lifestyle that is geared towards the improvement of individual wellness. This wellness means that an individual will engage in attitudes and behaviours that enhance quality of life and maximise personal potential. In the military this translates into a healthy and physically and mentally ready force capable of effectively carrying its vocation. Promotion of sport is an entity of a healthy lifestyle that becomes a challenging and important task of any military. This paper will carefully look at this issue from the point of motivating the soldiers to change their lifestyle and therefore move towards a higher state of wellness through sports. The rest of the paper will provide information and suggest sport-promoting activities to help all military personnel accept the personal challenge of wellness through sport. The paper looks at all the stakeholders that can enhance positive promotion of sporting lifestyle and why?

2.0 Components of Wellness

Why should the military be so concerned about inculcating a sporting lifestyle in its personnel? Sport heavily shoulders the element of wellness and sport is a critical component in translating high level of wellness. Achieving a high level of wellness requires individuals to constantly balance and maintain spiritual, social, emotional, intellectual and physical components. Within the components themselves there are factors that must be dealt with if optimal health is to be achieved.

2.1 Spiritual Component. It is the spiritual component that provides meaning and direction in life and enables each person to grow, learn, and meet new challenges. The military top brass and small unit leaders have a humongous task of educating both the officer and non commissioned officer corps about the value of fitness and how sport is a driving force in adding variety to entire physical program of the military. Military personnel should be sensitised that spirituality in the context of the military is that they should lead a sporting lifestyle that is meant to provide meaning and direction in life.

2.2 Emotional Component. Naturally, military life is very stressing due to many factors like being away from family members, handling very complicated cases and being in life threatening situations. Leading a sporting lifestyle plays an important role in making one to have the ability to control stress and to express emotions appropriately and comfortably. Emotional wellness is that state where one does not let setbacks and failures defeat him/her.

- 2.3 **Intellectual Component.** In the playing field you are confronted with complicated scenarios, overwhelming information that you have to analyse and transform it into a working plan. All these call for one to continue to learn to deal with new challenges effectively.
- 2.4 **Social Component.** This is a component that can be directly translated in the daily military task because it arms an individual with the ability to interact successfully with people and within the environment of which each person is a part. Sport is an important medium in developing this component since sports is culture that encourages the development and intimacy with others and teaches the respect and tolerance for those with different opinions and beliefs.
- 2.5 **Physical Component.** This component is core to the life of every soldier if you want to maintain an efficient and effective military which could be ready for any mission at any time. This component is a challenge to all since it addresses issues dealing with the ability to carryout daily military tasks, develop cardiovascular fitness, maintain adequate nutrition and proper body fat, avoid abusing drugs and alcohol and generally invest in a positive sporting lifestyle.

Obviously, each of the five components of wellness overlap to a certain extent, and factors in one component often directly affect the factors in another. For example it has been reported that 53% of the factors influencing quality of life can be influenced by the lifestyle of the individual. . Of the factors affecting quality of life, 10% are environmental, 16% are affected by the physicians and health care facilities that are available. Hypothetically 21% of the factors affecting health are beyond the individual's control. This 21% consists of the genes and hereditary tendencies received from the parents (Anspaugh, Hamrick and Rasaro 4).

3.0 Why Wellness or a Sporting Lifestyle?

Health problems exist among a large segment of military population that could have been prevented if each soldier could have paid more attention to his health. This is very evident in today's military population due to the scourge of HIV/AIDS, especially in the African militaries. It is very important that all the military commanders should recognize some of the dividends that can occur with increased attention of all the soldiers' health needs. Therefore, a sporting lifestyle still remains the priority choice if we need to effectively arrest this problem.

- 3.1 **Skyrocketing Health Care Costs.** Because of the spiralling health care costs it is unaffordable and not cost effective to have a sick military. Therefore involvement in sporting activities that have wellness benefits remains a big investment of the military. In an attempt to contain costs some businesses have even started requiring potential employees to undergo a medical examination.
- 3.2 **Health Risk Factors.** There are several human related factors that are uncontrollable, and some can be controlled with the assistance of a medical doctor, but there are some that we can control if we adopt a desirable lifestyle. We need medical assistance to control diseases like diabetes and hypertension, but we cannot control our sex, age or heredity. However it is possible to control such factors as diet, exercise, stress, cardio respiratory fitness and obesity. Statistics

concerning deaths among young soldiers 18-30 years old show the following causes of premature death; (1) accidents (2) suicides (3) HIV/AIDS. The incidence of these deaths could be reduced significantly if wellness promotion becomes a significant priority in the agenda of the commanding officers. A sporting lifestyle should reflect the integration of such components such as proper nutrition, regular and appropriate physical activity, stress management and elimination of controllable risk factors such as smoking and alcohol abuse.

Engaging in sports activities that enhance quality of life is a priority for the Botswana Defence Force. Currently there is a committee or board that is reviewing the current fitness standards to make them at par with the operational readiness of the defence force.

4.0 Benefits of a Sporting Lifestyle.

Living a non-sporting lifestyle is more difficult because it results in more illness, depression, decreased quality of life, and diminished satisfaction with life. But a sporting lifestyle improves each of the above situations. In addition, it improves how a person looks and feels while in the journey towards wellness. Choosing a sporting lifestyle can be beneficial in the following areas;

- 4.1 Improved cardiovascular system
- 4.2 Increased muscle tone, strength and flexibility and endurance, resulting in improved physical appearance
- 4.3 Decreased risk of developing or dying from chronic diseases and accidents
- 4.4 Decreased recovery time from injury and illness
- 4.5 Improves self image and morale and aids in fighting depression
- 4.6 Slows down the aging process
- 4.7 Supplying the body with proper nutrition
- 4.8 Learning to view life's difficulties as challenges and opportunities rather than overwhelming threats
- 4.9 Development of the self-confidence and ability to reach out to, understand and care about others.
- 4.10 Increases levels of energy and job productivity
- 4.11 Helps maintain ideal body weight

5.0 Accepting the Challenge to Strive for a Sporting Lifestyle.

- 5.1 Motivation.** The key to accepting high-level wellness is motivation. The stimuli for change increase when people perceive in their lives some impetus of change, such as being overweight, tiring too easily, or smoking too much. Any number of needs, motives, or fears may affect decision making at any one time. An officer or soldier who has just flunked a Physical Readiness Test (PRT) may be highly motivated to train very hard and be involved in an intensive sport programme to improve his physical fitness so that he passes his next PRT. An officer or soldier who has just suffered a heart attack may be highly motivated

to stop smoking, start exercising and change his eating habits, but a heart attack may not affect any other person at all.

5.2 National and Organisational Culture. To make beneficial changes the military needs to understand the influences that create individual behaviour. Certainly the family as well as kindergarten and primary education initiates a person's initial health habits and outlooks. Children do not start to brush their teeth or engage in sport activity because of a concern for dental or physical health but because their parents and teachers insist on it. Social pressure becomes increasingly important as children age. A significant contribution to acceptance of the challenge of wellness is the knowledge and attitude that are assimilated during a lifetime. Unfortunately knowledge alone is not enough to bring about change. Soldiers know that they should not engage in unprotected sex or should not use tobacco yet they continue contracting HIV or continue to use tobacco products. For a change to occur a soldiers' belief system must be affected. It is important that the military build a sound and accurate knowledge base. A sporting lifestyle should be made a core value for soldiers. If the benefits by being involved in sport or fitness are highly valued, there is a greater chance of making and adhering to change. Support in the form of awarding prizes, compliments from unit commanders and friends for those who have excelled in PRT and intramural sports competitions helps to provide motivation and reinforcement. If all officers and soldiers feel sport and fitness activities are important to their health, their advancement as well as the operational readiness of their military then the wellness challenge has been accepted.

5.3 Health Promotion Programmes. Many militaries are finding out that it costs less to keep officers and soldiers healthy than treating them once they are sick. Many sports and fitness programmes exist in many militaries alike, this is evident by the various sporting competitions we have in CISM. The Botswana Defence Force for example, offers on site fitness facilities to both soldiers and their family members. It is also important that there is coordination with the municipalities to put in place development programmes and community recreation and sport facilities that could be availed to military communities and the rest of the civilian community alike.

5.4 A way forward towards a positive Promotion of a sporting lifestyle. The military has to bare the costs of providing the basic wellness support to every soldier.

5.4.1 Embarrassment. Overweight soldiers should not be embarrassed but rather be assisted in overcoming their problem. Concrete weight loss programmes should be put in place.

5.4.2 Time Availability. All effort should be made by the military to create time either in the morning or afternoon that is compulsory for all the soldiers to participate in fitness or sporting activity.

5.4.3 Family Support. Military personnel spouses and dependants are also part of the military community;

therefore the whole family should be part of the physical education programme of the military. All military personnel and their families should be encouraged to take advantage of the fitness and sports facilities in the bases.

5.4.4 Proper Facilities and/or equipment. Provision of facilities is not enough but the facilities and equipment utilized should be up to standard and fulfil the needs of the customer. Variety when purchasing or constructing facilities should be taken into consideration. The facilities should easily be accessible to all.

5.4.5 Coordination with other Stakeholders. Consultation with stakeholders should be constantly maintained so that elements that encourage a sporting lifestyle are catered for, for example, the construction of roads in the camp should take into consideration inclusion of jogging tracks besides the road.

6.0 Conclusion. A sporting or wellness lifestyle should incorporate aspects of mental health, physical health, social health and emotional health in a manner that will allow every soldier to enjoy the highest level of health and well being possible. There is a need for wellness in today's military to prevent some of the existing health related problems that end up costing the military millions of dollars if not prevented but left to be cured. The military should create a culture of wellness through various means like sport, nutrition education, counselling, regular medical check ups of all the soldiers. This should be a culture that is inclusive of officers, spouses and dependant or the entire military community.