

# Health, Illness and Disease

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## Objectives:

After completing this article, the reader will be able to:

- Analyze the term health.
  - Evaluate the consistency of healthy people 2010 goals with definition of health.
  - Analyze the progress made in this regard.
  - Differentiate among health, illness, disease disability and premature death.
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## Exploring the Concepts of Health:

Health is a core concept in society. This concept is modified with qualities such as excellent, good fair or poor, based on a variety of factors. These factors include age, gender, race or ethnic heritage, comparison group, current health or physical condition, past conditions, social or economic situation, or the demands of various roles in society.

Newman states that medical literature can be classified broadly within two major paradigms.<sup>1-3</sup>

The first is the wellness illness continuum ranging from high-level wellness to depletion of health and death. High-level wellness is conceptualized further as a sense of well-being, life satisfaction, and quality of life. Movement towards the negative end of the continuum includes adaptation to disease and disability through various levels of functional ability.<sup>4</sup>

The second paradigm characterized health as a unidirectional development phenomenon of unitary patterning of the person-environment. Although not endorsing the development perspective to the extent of Rogers<sup>5</sup> and Reed,<sup>6</sup> several authors state that health is an outcome of ongoing patterns of person-environment interaction throughout the life span.<sup>7-9</sup> Health can be better understood if each person is seen as a part of a complex interconnected biological, and social system.

People involved in health promotion should consider the meaning of health for themselves and for others, because a focused definition clarifies their work and enhances the quality of the health care system. Because the term health is used to describe a number of entities, such as a philosophy of care (health promotion and health maintenance), a system (health care delivery system), practices (good health practices), behaviors (health behaviors), costs (health care costs), and insurance, the reason

that confusion continues regarding its use becomes clear. People's experience with health in all of its entities have also changes over time.<sup>10</sup> There has been a more recent emphasis on the quality of a person's life as a component of health.

Research on self-rated health<sup>11</sup> and self-rated function<sup>12</sup> indicates that numerous factors contribute to a person's perception of health. In addition to the ability to function cognitively and physically (that is functional health), fulfill social roles and obtain health services, health is related to environment, socioeconomic level, race, and geographical location. Health is also directly linked to how providers perceive the recipients of services and the options that providers offer.

## Models of Health:

Throughout history, society has entered a variety of concepts of health.<sup>13</sup> Smith describes four distinct models of health.<sup>4</sup>

### Clinical Model:-

In the clinical model, the absence of signs and symptoms indicates health. Illness would be the presence of conspicuous signs and symptoms of disease. People who use this model may not seek preventive health services, or they may wait until they are very ill to seek care. The clinical model is the conventional model of the discipline of medicine.

### Role Performance Model:

In the role performance model, health is indicated by the ability to perform social roles. Role performance includes work, family and social roles, with performance based on societal expectations. Illness would be the failure to perform a person's role at the level of others in society. This model is the basis for work and school physical examinations and physician-excused absences.

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**Adaptive Model:**

In this model, the ability to adapt positively to social, mental and physiological change is indicative of health. Illness occurs when the person fails to adapt or becomes maladaptive towards these changes.

**Eudaimonistic Model:-**

In this model, health is indicated by exuberant well-being. Derived from Greek terminology, this term indicates a model that embodies the interaction and inter-relationships among the physical, social, psychological and spiritual aspects of life and the environment. Illness is indicated by a denervation or languishing, a wasting away, or lack of involvement with life.

**Wellness-illness Continuum**

Wellness-illness continuum is a dichotomous depiction of the relationship between the concepts of health and illness. In this paradigm wellness is a positive state in which incremental increases in health can be made beyond the midpoint. These increases represent improved physical and mental health states. The opposite end of the continuum is illness, with the possibility of incremental decreases in health beyond the midpoint. A second dimension, high-level wellness was added to the health-illness continuum, in which a matrix of a favorable environment allows high-level wellness to occur whereas an unfavourable environment allows low-level wellness to exist.

The concept demonstrates that a person can have a terminal disease and be emotionally prepared for death, while acting as a support for other people and achieving high-level wellness. High-level wellness involves progression towards a higher level of functioning, an open-ended and ever-expanding future with its challenge of fuller potential, and the integration of the whole being.<sup>14</sup>

**Health Ecology:**

An evolving view of health recognizes the interconnection among people and their physical and social environments. New-man<sup>3</sup> expressed this interconnection within a development framework, and the work of Gordon<sup>15</sup> applies this interconnection to functional health patterns.

Health from an ecological perspective is multidimensional extending from the individual into the surrounding community and including the context within which the person functions. This view of health expands on high-level wellness by recognizing that social and environmental factors can enhance or limit

health and healthy behaviours. For example, most people can benefit from physical activity such as walking. People are more likely to walk in areas where there are sidewalks or pathways and where they feel safe.

**Functioning:**

One of the defining characteristics of life is the ability to function. Similar to the concept of health, functional health can be characterized as being present or absent, at high level, or at low level.

Functioning is integral to health. Physical, mental, and social levels of function are reflected in terms of performance and social expectations. For example, sudden loss of the ability to move an arm or leg may indicate a stroke. The inability to leave the house may indicate overwhelming fear.<sup>12</sup>

**Health:**

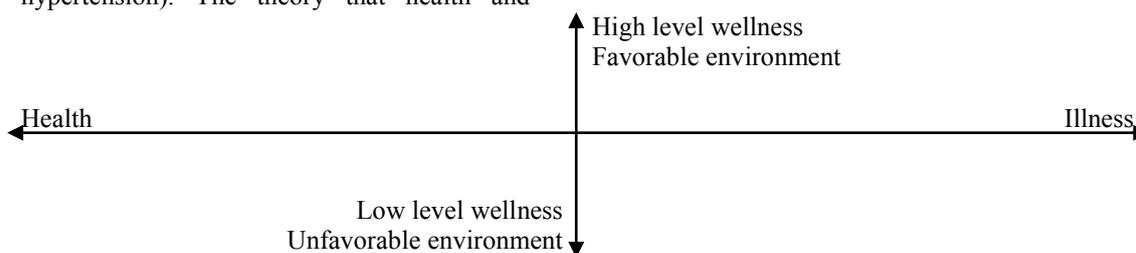
Health, as defined above is a state of physical, mental and social functioning that realizes a persons potential. Health is an individual's responsibility, but it requires collective action to ensure a society and an environment in which people can act responsibly. The culture and beliefs of the people can also influence health. This definition is consistent with the World Health Organization definition of health as the state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity. In addition, to being measurable in process and outcomes, this definition is applicable across the lifespan, particularly for older adults whose functional abilities may determine needed services.<sup>16</sup>

**Illness, Disease, and Health**

It is easy to think of health or wellness as the lack of disease and to consider illness and disease interchangeable terms. However, health and disease are not simply antonyms, and disease and illness are not synonyms. Disease may be defined as the failure of a person's adaptive mechanisms to counteract stimuli and stresses adequately, resulting in functional or structural disturbances. This definition is an ecological concept of disease, which uses a multifactorial perspective rather than a search for a single cause. This approach increases the chances of discovering the various factors that may be susceptible to intervention. Health and disease must be viewed as inseparable variations of development over time. If disease does not exist, then there is no need to discuss health. Illness is a social construct in which people are in an imbalanced, unsustainable relationship

with their environment and are failing in their ability to survive and create a higher quality of life. Illness is a response characterized by a mismatch between a person's needs and the resources available to meet those needs. Additionally, the illness signals to individuals and populations that the present balance is not working. Disease is a biomedical term indicating the presence of a recognizable health deviation, whereas illness is a state of being. Illness has social, psychological, and biomedical components. A person can have a disease without feeling ill (e.g., asymptomatic hypertension). The theory that health and

illness are dynamic patterns that change with time and social circumstances leads to the conclusion that health assessments must be made frequently during the life cycle. Most health evaluations are relative and based on a series of perceptions and observations rather than a limited standard of measurement. Health arises from a finely graded continuum of functional ability and disability, not from mutually exclusive categories. Health, illness, and disease are neither static nor stationary. Behind every condition is the phenomenon of almost constant alternation.<sup>10</sup>



**Fig 1:** Wellness – Illness continuum with high-level wellness added. Movement from the center to the left demonstrates movement toward health, movement from the center to the right demonstrates movement toward illness. Moving above the line demonstrates movement toward increasing wellness. Moving below the line demonstrates movement toward decreasing wellness.

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