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Keynote speech title: "Making healthy options easier options"

ABSTRACT:

Obtaining a healthy population requires a multisectoral commitment to making healthy options accessible to people. Yet, health promotion efforts tend to focus on motivating individuals to make better choices without changing the social, economic, environmental and political factors that determine human behavior. And, discussions of strategies and policies that make healthy choices easier often spark debate about individual rights and freedoms and fears coercing people to behave in ways they would not do "normally." How can we make healthy options easier options and do so in an ethical and responsible way? This talk will provide evidence and insights about simple and responsible ways to make it easier for the population to make healthy choices.

Making healthy options easier options

INTRODUCTION:

Good health, or the hope of good health, is one of the few values shared universally by people across the globe and throughout history. People want good health and health is one of the criteria used when assessing great political leadership.

While the health challenges we face today are great, we have more tools and more knowledge at our fingertips than ever before. The gap between the health we have and the health we could have is not primarily a failure of knowledge. It is a failure to share that knowledge effectively, and to translate it into action, which means that we fail to realize the potential of our collective intelligence. As a result, lives are cut short when cures are known; suffering persists where relief is possible; and ill health holds back individuals, families and societies from achieving their potential.

We know the risk factors for poor health, illness and disease. The "big four" diet, physical activity, tobacco and alcohol and we have data on these. So how is the Swiss population doing?

Swiss Data

- National Health survey 2017
- SOPHYA:
- Kids are not moving enough. Parents are not moving enough. But when parents move, kids move. SO, we have to make PA easier for parents. Much emphasis is placed on sport and club activities, but we have to make it easy to integrate PA into the daily life. Bike lanes, e-bike incentives, parks for all ages in neighborhoods, bike sharing, ... places to play.
- Ticino studies show that: Kids are not meeting the dietary guidelines; They eat better at home with parents; They have good knowledge of healthy foods and like them.; In communicating healthy foods, they like cartoons, but want to eat "real food"; When given a choice, they choose unhealthy items

Individual choice or societal choice?

People are exposed to 2nd hand smoke simply by going to work, for a run, or doing their shopping. Children are smoking because their parents smoke or the people at the park smoke. This means that others people behaviors are harming people who are engaged in the healthy choice. That is not free choice. That is not making health options easy options. Rather it is making unhealthy choices of some, the unhealthy choice of all. Is that manipulation? It is certainly unethical.

Simply providing more health services to treat disease is no longer a viable or sustainable option. In the absence of massive and politically improbable market intervention, policy makers, NGOs, and health professionals are left with few other options than to try to influence individuals to make smarter choices. Doing so requires a range of strategies, including communication, policy, design, systems, economics, education and service delivery.

IN other words, Assuming we do not have a massive shift in policy and mandate healthy behaviors, **we have to make healthy options easy options.**

For me, using an evidence based model for addressing social problems caused by human behavior is a “reasonable” idea.

Behavior change COM-B

Social mktg is the discipline that is holistic:

Social marketing has been endorsed as a framework of choice in several policy documents and governments and agencies are increasingly recommending it to tackle some of the most severe problems facing Europe today; including NCDs, vaccinations and immunizations. Social marketing moves beyond individual approaches and creates conditions in which individuals, communities, and service providers have accessible options for socially good behaviors.

- We already mandate some behaviors – or penalize some
- create supportive environments
- clear labelling and information

SUMMARY:

We have to stop blaming only citizens for their actions. We also have to stop trying to change their behavior with poster campaigns.

We, collectively as public health practitioners, researchers, urban planners, businesses and policy makers and influencers, have a responsibility to make healthy options easy options. That means making sure that people have capacity, opportunity and motivation to adopt healthy behaviors.

Unless we make healthy options at least as easy as unhealthy options, we cannot claim to have “free choice”. And until we stop making unhealthy options easier than healthy options, we will not get better health faster. We have to do better and we can do better. After all, healthy citizens are the greatest asset a country can have.