

# Healthy Island life styles – E Kau!/?

THE HONORABLE MASAO M. UEDA \*

Distinguished and honored guests. On behalf of the Ministry of Health, Republic of Palau, it is my distinct pleasure to welcome all of our outside guests to our lovely island nation, the Emerald of the Pacific. I am very pleased to have this unique opportunity to share some of my thoughts with you about "healthy island lifestyle", the title and theme of this 2nd Annual PBMA Conference.

In the olden days, Pacific Islanders lived a healthy lifestyle by subsisting on foods such as fish and other seafood, taro-roots, stem and leaves, and various abundant fruits, rich in nutrients that protected them from diseases. Limited intoxication was through tuba and kava, and there was little tobacco use, even in betel nut chewing. Sexually transmitted diseases were unknown. Daily exercise was provided through walking everywhere, through farming and fishing.

Today we have come to understand that physical fitness through good nutrition and physical exercise, spiritual and mental balance are the key factors to maintaining wellness. It appears these factors were implicitly understood then because people and community were the focus of activities. Back then society placed people first, and wellness was attributed to wholesome and socially acceptable behaviors.

The advent of western health care system brought a more disease-centered and cure-oriented approach to health care. This is diametrically opposed to the people-centered way previously espoused by our elders, as mentioned. We now know that current and future health approaches must begin

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with prevention and health promotion in our communities and everywhere.

We are experiencing a period of accelerated economic and social change and development. These changes make it imperative for us to *reassess, reevaluate* and *synthesize* our traditional values of care and wholesomeness as we merge them with the modern medical approaches to promote wellness and health among our peoples. I regard this as one of the greatest challenges that all of the health care leaders in the Pacific face today. In order to accept and rise to the challenge we must move forward with appropriate health planning. We must implement the plans we make. We must encourage and empower island people to help themselves, take more responsibilities for themselves by readopting and recapturing the island way of living. Our natural heritage is rich with healthy lifestyles and activities which promote physical fitness such as fishing and farming, dancing; activities which promote mental balance such as singing, chanting, and wholesome forms of competition; activities that promote social cohesiveness such as community projects. We never lacked activities that stimulated and enriched our imagination and creativity, activities which enhanced respect and honor for our fellows. And of course

our beautiful, pristine environment provided the backdrop that supported all of these activities that had a positive and healthy outcome. These must be the primary focus in our preventive health programs again.

Managing change is necessary in our approach to rejuvenate the positive aspects of the past and merge them in a harmonious manner with the current modern methods to build positive health for our people in our respective islands. Minor changes in health programs and realignments in health services are not enough. We must first recognize our limitations in resources including manpower, money, materials and management. We need to plan well to accommodate for our limitations and approach problems as they arise. We must work as a team using multidisciplinary techniques in solving our human development issues.

\* Minister of Health, Republic of Palau. Keynote Address at the Second Pacific Basin Medical Association Conference, Koror, Palau, May 13-15, 1996.

Focusing on a team approach to planning and executing health related activities will ensure the best use of limited resources. Through all of these, two key concepts must still be in the forefront: health promotion and health protection.

Physicians are considered the primary agent of change in health care settings. They are highly respected as professionals in the island communities where they reside. They have the power to persuade, to discipline, to encourage, to empathize, and to provide advice to help people get back on the road to good health by identifying unhealthy habits and helping develop attitudinal changes concerning positive health. They can play a key role as team leaders in health activities. They carry respect and the community listens to their leadership and guidance. They also have a direct channel to the patient and his or her health needs.

As team leaders, physicians need to know that the infrastructure of the health system can support their goals and objectives for providing health promotion and protection for the clients that they serve. Administrators and clinicians must work together in harmony towards improving health outcomes for the community that they mutually serve. By working as a team, in collaboration/cooperation with the Community leadership, barriers can be identified, specific issues can be addressed and services can be developed and implemented. Without this coordination, our people suffer.

You have an opportunity, to share your knowledge and skills concerning health promotion and protection. Cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, STDs, many of the behavior health prob-

lems and other illnesses to be discussed are, for the most part, preventable diseases. A change in life style can improve health outcomes in our communities. We must infuse this concept into the development of national and regional policies and programs through increasing people's knowledge about healthy life styles and acting as agents in changing people's behaviors.

We need to seek ways to improve the nutritional values of our people's diets. Protection of the fragile environment must be emphasized through good management and treatment of raw sewage and disposal of solid waste. We must do these so that our lands and seas remain clean and healthy. Now is also the time to think about management for assuring clean air. We must all work hard to discourage the "throw-away" lifestyle.

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Again, these are among the key strategies for improving health outcomes and enhancing the quality of our lives. The framework of health care in our islands must now emphasize health promotion and protection, resulting in adherence to healthy life styles for our people. This has been decided upon by island health leaders and expressed in the Yanuca Island Health Declaration. The impetus for drastic cultural, economic and societal change is upon us. We must be leaders in our communities in promoting individual responsibility toward changes in beliefs and behaviors regarding healthy island lifestyles. We must accept this challenge with commitment and determination, because we are the catalysts for change in the health sector. A coordinated team approach will result in better health outcomes for all. I would like to end with this thought, "HEALTHY ISLAND LIFE STYLES--E KAU!/? Yes, appropriately, the Palauan E KAU also means -- ITS UP TO YOU! Thank you and good luck.

**" The increasing role of multi-sectorial cooperation between government departments has contributed ... to sound socio-economic development, including health ... especially in the areas of human resource development and the provision of health facilities ... "**

**HON. DR. SIONE TAPA, MINISTER OF HEALTH, TONGA**  
***in Commemorative Oration, Tonga Medical Association:***  
***Selected Papers 1992***