

Physical activity and health in Switzerland – where are we in 2009?

“Youth+Sport” was introduced with a constitutional vote in 1970 and with a federal law in 1972. Already then, “guiding youth to a healthy lifestyle” was an essential goal of our national sport promotion programme. Over the following decades, technological change was rapid and physical inactivity became a serious problem for substantial parts also of the Swiss population. A first national symposium “Sport – Physical Activity – Health” was held in Magglingen in 1995. In 1999, the national network for health-enhancing physical activity HEPA Switzerland was founded, in 2000 the Federal Government adopted the Concept for a National Sports Policy with “more physically active people” as its first objective, and since summer 2008 Switzerland also has a National Programme on Diet and Physical Activity.

The growing popularity of the issue has been accompanied by a growing number of research and implementation projects carried out by a whole number of institutions from different parts of Switzerland. However, such a development can also lead to declarations which are not followed by adequate action and to activism rather than targeted activities. Therefore, an evidence-based approach is necessary. Cavill and colleagues (2006) have suggested four key tasks for this purpose which are shown in *table 1*.

- **Using the evidence for the health benefits of physical activity to “make the case”**
“What is the nature of the problem?”
- **Conducting surveillance to collect evidence on the prevalence of physical activity**
“What is the problem’s extent?”
- **Reviewing evidence on “what works” in increasing physical activity**
“What is the most effective way to tackle this problem?”
- **Evaluating practice**
“How can progress be monitored and evaluated?”

Table 1: The four key tasks of a systematic evidence-based approach to physical activity promotion (Cavill et al., 2006).

Since 1996 the Health Promotion Unit of the Institute of Sport Sciences and since 2005 the Physical Activity and Health Branch of the Swiss Federal Institute of Sport in Magglingen have been active in a series of projects with their partners. The articles in this issue give an overview of these activities and – while certainly not representing the work of all Swiss groups active in the field – they also give an impression of where our country stands in the field of physical activity and health. The review on recommendations and monitoring of physical activity in Switzerland clearly relates to the first two questions of Cavill and colleagues, the articles by Zimmermann-Sloutskis and Wyss as well as the second one by Jimmy to the second question. The article by Thüring refers to a specific intervention research project, while most of the other ones describe approaches to evaluating practice. International scientific journals have traditionally shown only limited interest in more practice-oriented aspects, but features as the ones recently published in the *British Medical Journal* (McColl, 2009) seem to be indicating a change in this attitude. The review by Martin-Diener on the Swiss base documents illustrates what attempts are made to communicate the evidence on all levels to a broader public of professionals and decision makers.

Physical activity has come into fashion. In order to guarantee the optimal use of public resources and also to provide guidance for private initiatives, it is necessary to examine the evidence for both the health relevance of physical activity and for the effectiveness of interventions. We hope this issue can contribute to this task.

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References

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