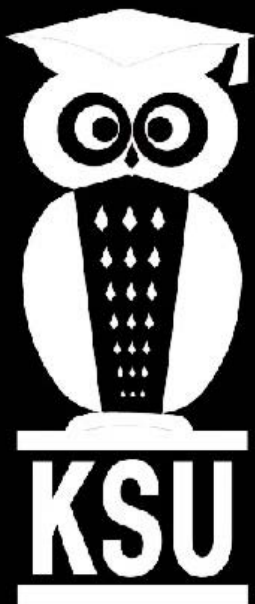


KSU HEALTH POLICY

as approved by KPS on 15th march 2006



Thanks to:
andrea zaffarese
caroline mallia
christine cassar
corinne elbourne
eman pulis
ivan zammit
jennifer magri
priscilla muscat
wendy attard

Contents - Health Policy

1. Introduction
2. A Healthy Attitude
 - Physical Activity
 - Good Nutrition
 - Regular Checkups
3. Psychological Health
 - Stress
 - Counselling Services
 - Productive Leisure Activities
 - Lecture Organisation
4. Substance abuse
 - Tobacco
 - Drugs
 - Alcohol
5. Sexual Health
6. Health and Hygiene at University
 - First Aid
 - Health Services
7. Public Health and Personal Health Insurance
8. Conclusion

Introduction

In many cases, student life demands a certain form of lifestyle from young people and mature students alike. However, young students go through other major changes in this time of their life. Along with physical changes, the student is learning to become more independent and is in an ongoing process of making choices that will affect him or her throughout life. For many, this is a very hectic time but one must not forget the importance of health and well being in the successes of one's life.

For this reason, the Social Policy Commission within KSU has taken the initiative in adopting a health policy. The policy defines some points that are relevant to the student with regards to a healthy lifestyle and makes an emphasis on the importance of physical and psychological health.

A Healthy Attitude

Physical Activity

Regular physical activity over a lifetime may overcome the effects of inherited risks such as coronary heart diseases, cardiovascular diseases, stroke, high blood pressure (hypertension), peripheral vascular diseases, some forms of cancer, osteoporosis and others. There are, however, other benefits to be gained from participating regularly in physical activity, including improved social and psychological health. Furthermore, evidence supports the claim that one positive lifestyle change (e.g. attending a fitness club) often leads to another (e.g. eating a balanced diet).

Before beginning a regular physical activity program, it is important to establish your medical readiness to participate. Physical activity should be increased progressively for safe and effective results. You must also keep in mind that some sports are more active than others and it is thus important to seek advice before engaging in strenuous physical activity.

At student-level, regular physical activity or participation in sport as well as a healthy diet can help you adapt to stressful situations such as exam periods. Physical activity can provide effective relief from stress and aid in muscle tension release. Stretching exercises and rhythmical exercises especially aid in relaxation while conscious breathing and relaxation techniques can be another effective way to combat stress and muscle tension.

Good Nutrition

KSU is made up of University students and therefore is aware that the lifestyle of a student is very taxing. Most of the time healthy food is not a salient matter on the agenda. Eating a balanced diet is however very important when students are under stress. It is very easy to skip and forget meals while busy meeting deadlines but this is the time when our body needs good nutrition most. A healthy diet helps students to concentrate and keep focused when under stress. It is very important to keep the energy levels up by eating healthy snacks and regular meals.

Good nutrition does not imply starving, loss of weight or dedicating time to prepare complicated dishes. KSU feels that students need to be better informed on how to lead a healthy lifestyle and encourage them to invest some time in informing themselves how to eat healthy and take informed decisions.

The key to maintaining a well balanced diet is to get organised and make the right choices. Students should get into the habit of bringing healthy snacks such as cereals and fruit, which one can easily eat between lectures. This is a simple routine that does not require much effort and will help students to refrain from buying unhealthy fast foods to satisfy momentarily cravings.

Lunches are also a priority when one is on campus for a long day. Skipping lunch is not an option even if time is a constant constraint. Packed lecture schedules should not be the reason for students to skip lunch.

KSU encourages one to choose from an array of healthy food over fatty foods even if the latter are more available and might be cheaper. Helping oneself to a light snack every two hours and one healthy lunch while on campus will maintain a healthy eating schedule.

Health Checkups

Living a healthy lifestyle is certainly a key strategy for a healthy, long life but it is not a guarantee that you will never get a serious illness. KSU recognizes the importance of health education as an incentive to help students to take care of themselves by learning how to examine themselves in order to observe any changes taking place in their body. It is also very important to get health exams on a regular basis as recommended by the doctor including basic health tests; a healthy weight determination, blood pressure check, cholesterol check, glucose test for diabetes and other tests according to the age and health condition of the individual. Keeping up to date on recommended immunizations is also an effective way of preventing serious illness.

The aim of these checkups is to help to target, reduce and eliminate health risks, thus as a primary prevention and also to diagnose potential health problems. In this way, treatment of injuries and diseases is facilitated since they are diagnosed at an early stage. KSU thus emphasize the importance of regular checkups. By detecting health problems early, serious health complications and even death can often be prevented.

Psychological Health

Stress

KSU believes that the psychological health of the students is an important factor that affects academic achievement and thus it is important to try to safeguard it as much as possible. Stress is a prevalent problem in the student's life due to the increasing workload. Consequently stress management is very important to enhance the psychological well-being of the students. KSU encourages students to adopt ways to control stress.

Faculty based organisations together with the student representative through the Education Commission should guide new students through the academic system. Issues such as how to apply for new credits should be further explained so as to reduce tension and worry. Timetables should be issued in a way where lectures are spaced out as to permit the students to have time to rest between one lecture and another. As regards students, they should be encouraged not to fill these spaces with optional credits. In this way the student's concentration and input in lectures is sustained. Adequate time management is advisable. These rest periods will also give a chance to the individual to be active in student life and so acquire other useful skills while resting.

KSU encourages faculties to space out the exams throughout the week in a reasonable way to allow students to focus more their study and preparation, hence reducing stress. Moreover lecturer's availability is an important factor; as in this way students find it easier to bring forward their problems and express their ideas.

Counselling Services

It is important to encourage students to seek support through the counselling services. Awareness should be created in such a way as to make the student feel more comfortable in using these services. The dual role of the counselling services should be emphasised in order to create an environment where students view counselling as an aid rather than as a need.

KSU also believe that seminars or talks where the guest speakers address various stress management issues and factors such as instruction in relaxation techniques, diet planning, communication skills, time-management skills and other incentives encouraging life style improvements, could be of great help to the individual.

Productive Leisure Activities

More incentives should be given to encourage students to get involved in extra-curricular activities, such as joining committees and organizations where students learn to be more cooperative and have the opportunity to express their individuality.

Students should also be encouraged to take part in relaxing activities and sports. These activities are a useful resource for combating the adverse effects of stress and may also have a beneficial effect on learning and concentration. Taking care of oneself has been proven to be effective in increasing the psychological well-being of the individual.

Another important factor affecting the psychological well-being of a person is the environment in which one lives. The constant improvement of the university infrastructure and leisure areas is to be given its due importance, with improvements promoting the engagement of students in productive leisure activities.

Lecture Organization

Lectures could adopt a structure that motivates students to be active and express themselves rather than just passively receiving knowledge. Moreover, credits helping students to develop their intellectual thoughts and to expand their creativity are also to be encouraged and made available as optional credits to all students as these may be very helpful in all spheres of life.

Courses should be structured in a way as to prepare the student for the future workplace. Thus, throughout their course, students not only acquire knowledge but also learn to apply that knowledge to their daily experience. In this way students feel more interested and get a better understanding of the course work. This may also be achieved by encouraging placements in different settings where students can shadow professionals whilst doing their work.

Substance abuse

Tobacco

KSU applauds the campaigns regarding smoking and the new law, which bans tobacco advertisements on television. KSU promotes the sustained implementation and enforcement of this law and in continuing the awareness campaigns. A number of students have stopped smoking and our work should not stop here. It is necessary to make students aware about the synergistic affects of smoking, alcohol and drug abuse, thus educating students about these affects is very important. Smokers are to be encouraged to use alternative solutions in order to quit smoking.

Drugs

Drug abuse is usually associated with many diseases, due to the exchanging of needles or because of reckless behaviour under the influence of drugs or even excessive alcohol.

Although drugs like heroin or cocaine are illegal, medicines such as codeine are not. Students should be made aware of medicine abuse. Powerful analgesics (painkillers) and the sniffing of glues and correction pens are abused by a number of people.

KSU is also concerned about abuse of tranquillisers. These medicines should only be used for a couple of weeks, but people abuse resulting in not being able to sleep without them. These medicines are very commonly used during the exam period where students are usually very tense.

Antibiotics are also medicines that are greatly abused. Students do not realize that having a common cold doesn't require the use of an antibiotic since such a condition cannot be treated with antibiotics. The misuse of antibiotics may lead to bacterial resistance.

Amphetamines are potent stimulants of the central nervous system. They induce exhilarating feelings of power, strength, energy, self-assertion, focus and enhanced motivation. The need to sleep or eat is diminished (thus they may be abused by people who are dieting) and feelings are intensified.

Diuretics are also a class of medicines that are abused for weight loss. When a person urinates frequently i.e. there is water loss, there is concomitant weight loss. People who suffer from constipation also commonly abuse stimulant laxatives. This may result in a dysfunctional intestine. Laxatives are also abused for weight loss.

Alcohol

KSU remarks that the abuse of alcohol can result in an unwanted effect and should be avoided. No excuse can justify lack of moderation. Abusing alcohol for a long period of time leads to addiction, as well as irreversible organ damage. Students should be warned about abusing alcohol while they are taking other medications. One is also to inform students, that one time abuse of alcohol still has its effects, which even though on a short term basis, can prove to be dangerous both to the abuser and to those around him/her.

KSU is adamant in accepting no promotional material that encourages substance abuse, and believes in the importance of organizing educational campaigns to inform student on the effects of such an unhealthy attitude.

Sexual Health

KSU recognizes that the only effective way of preventing the risk of getting infected by any sexually transmitted infection is to abstain from sexual activity. Anyone who engages in sexual activity should ensure that the parties involved are not infected. Faithfulness within sexual relationships will reduce the risk of getting infected. Students should have access to adequate information from educational programs regarding the way STI's are transmitted and the practice of protected sex. One must ensure that the information obtained is done so from a reliable source. The use of protection will decrease the risk of infection only if used properly.

If one is sexually active regular checkups and tests are important. Counselling before tests is advisable and has proven to be helpful. Post counselling to infected persons is highly recommended especially in cases where STI's effects are permanent.

Health and Hygiene at University

First Aid

KSU believes that each building in University should be equipped with a First Aid Point and should have people trained to man it in case of an emergency. With this philosophy, KSU maintains a Clinic in Students' House, which is another step towards securing health on campus.

Such efforts would however only be useful if students know about the availability of these First Aid Points, and this can only be achieved with adequate promotion and marketing with each individual student. KSU also encourages appropriate first aid arrangements during activities. The safety sign system needs upgrading and a safety protocol should be promoted and implemented.

Bringing up students in such an environment will lead to the implementation of such safety measures at their future workplace.

Health Services

While improvement is always indispensable, KSU highly applauds the present hygiene levels at university. Efforts to keep up cleanliness should come from the authorities as well as from the person who makes use of the facilities provided.

On a further note, the lack of a pharmacy in the university surroundings is a subject often brought up when consulting with other university students.

KSU believes that there is still much more to be done with regards to health education and therefore encourage students to search for and attend courses regarding health and safety matters such as first aid courses. Knowing what to do in case of an emergency is an asset for everyone and should be on the agenda of each university student. Apart from these courses KSU feels the need of creating optional credits open to everyone, dealing with basic aspects of health.

Public Health and Personal Health Insurance

As a Maltese citizen, one has free access to all services offered within the National Health Services package. This scheme is based on a triage waiting system, with emergency operations being given priority. A private health service runs parallel to this scheme, at a cost to the patient. For this reason, KSU encourages authorities to give incentives on health insurances and students to invest in such policies, in order to be able to afford or get reimbursed on private medical service costs that may be incurred. One is to consider this investment as a safety measure even at a young age since one never knows when the need will arise.

KSU encourages students and the public to apply for and make use of the European health insurance card (EHIC). As EU Citizens, we are entitled to treatment at the same rates as a citizen of the EU/EEA country being visited in case of acute medical conditions. Possession of an EHIC card does not include arrangements for travel insurance for which a personal health insurance is also to be considered when making travel arrangements especially when travelling outside the EU.

Conclusion

KSU is committed to respecting and promoting this policy for the well being of all University students. In this way, students will enjoy a better life while at University through the improvement of their quality of life and also the environment in which they live.

It is also vital that the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle is encouraged at an early age and thus KSU feels that students have the duty of passing on these guidelines to others by setting an example themselves. KSU suggests that students should take the above recommendations as a guideline for life.