

spectra

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Indulgence and risk

2 Comics competition

What role does indulgence play in our lives? How much indulgence do we need? Do we inevitably want more of it? At what point does indulgence turn into addiction? These questions are the focus of the competition featuring in this year's Fumetto Comix Festival in Lucerne. Together with the Federal Office of Public Health, the Festival management has invited comic artists from all over the world to apply their drawing talents to the subject of indulgence and addiction.

3 Indulgence and its limits

Indulgence and the sense of wellbeing it engenders are preconditions of a fulfilled life. However, indulgence without limits results in over-indulgence, dependence and addiction and the corresponding risks to our health. We live in a society and an age in which "too much" causes more problems than scarcity does. Yet despite an excess of opportunities for indulgence, a healthy approach is still possible because of the ability to cope with indulgence that the individual is born with or can learn. For the community as a whole, there is a need for structural conditions and rules that limit the negative consequences of over-indulgence as much as possible.

4 Strategy for combating non-communicable diseases

Eva Bruhin heads up the Administrative Office of the "National Strategy for the Prevention of Non-communicable Diseases". This strategy will, by 2016, draw up measures designed to stem the spread of cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular, respiratory and musculoskeletal diseases in Switzerland. Why is such a strategy needed? What exactly is it intended to achieve and where does it stand in relation to the national prevention programmes already in existence? "spectra" put these questions to Eva Bruhin.



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"Indulgence or addiction" at the Fumetto Comix Festival



Prevention partnership. What do we actually mean by indulgence? And when does indulgence become addiction – particularly in young people? To find this out and to launch a corresponding dialogue, the Federal Office of Public Health and Fumetto Comix Festival Lucerne have organised a competition on the topic of "Indulgence or addiction".

The demarcation line between indulgence and high-risk consumption – whether of alcohol, food, media and a lot more – is fluid and it is perceived differently, depending on the individual. It is therefore not surprising that many people have a problem talking about it or pointing out abnormal behaviour to others. Those who do so are immediately dismissed as spoilsports or moralisers.

This year's Fumetto Comix Competition performs a balancing act on the topic and asks the question: "Indulgence or addiction – now and then, every so often, regularly, excessively?" The annual competition is one of the core features of the festival. It gives comic-book artists an opportunity to measure themselves against their international peers and make themselves known to a broad public. The annual competition has also become a springboard for young comic artists from all over the world. Fumetto receives up to 1,000 submissions from over 30 countries every year.

A competition rather than a campaign

Some prevention messages can be very effectively disseminated through broadly based mass-media campaigns. This approach has yielded very good results in the last few years in the field of tobacco control. However, the subject of addiction is complex and requires a more nuanced approach. It is not just a question of changing behaviour patterns in individuals; it is also about developing and promoting an awareness, at the level of society, of indulgence, risk and addiction and its consequences. So there also has to be discussion of social and cultural values, of how much indulgence we need and where the individual boundary lies beyond which indulgence becomes addiction. This cannot be achieved with a mass media campaign alone; it requires additional communication channels and platforms.

Nowadays, children and adolescents in particular are not adequately reached by standard communication and information media such as posters, leaflets or websites. Yet a dialogue with these groups is enormously important because adolescence is an experimental phase which also includes risk-taking. Risk-taking behaviour is part of the normal development process and a typical feature of young people's lifestyle; it is generally abandoned as the young people take on more responsibility, for instance in their work.

Comics as prevention media

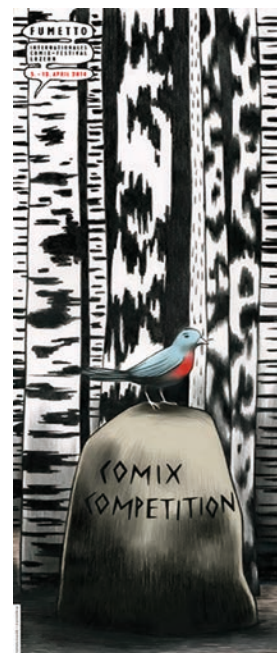
Prevention therefore needs innovative approaches and forms of dialogue in the habitual setting and language of adolescents in order to show them how they can tackle this complex subject. The Fumetto Competition is one such approach. Picture-books and comics have always been popular means of familiarising children and adolescents with the world at large. They are a way of portraying almost any topic in an age-appropriate manner. With a combination of reflection and narrative, children and adolescents can also address more serious social issues such as xenophobia, violence or, as here, addiction.

The Fumetto Competition not only encourages participants to think about the psychological, social and family-related aspects of addictions and about the demarcation line between harmless habit and incipient risk-taking behaviour. Festival visitors will subsequently have an opportunity to inspect the submissions during the exhibition of nominated works. The individual stories will give the abstract, often taboo subject of addiction a face, thereby encouraging discussion and debate.

Lastly, the Federal Office of Public Health can also learn something from the competition. Not much is known about what young people think about addiction. The images and comics they submit should yield many answers and suggestions regarding the ways in which prevention messages can best reach young people.

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Fumetto Comix Festival, Lucerne, 5–13 April 2014

The Fumetto is a festival for comics, visual arts, graphics and illustration. Initiated in 1992, the nine-day event is staged every year in spring. The festival targets a wide spectrum of visitors, ranging from school classes, students and artists to art-loving and culturally interested members of the public. The underlying concept of the festival includes educational tools for every age group and different needs – hand-outs, guided tours, apps, talks by artists present at their exhibitions, drawing courses and teaching material for school classes. The Fumetto attracts around 50,000 visitors each year.

Indulgence and risk



Indulgence and the sense of wellbeing it engenders

The ability to cope with indulgence helps prevent addiction. The ability to indulge in, or enjoy, something is a precondition of a fulfilled life, and the ability to identify the point at which indulgence takes on dangerous dimensions will protect the individual and society from negative consequences. Individuals therefore need to possess the ability to cope with indulgence, and the community needs to have rules that set boundaries to individual freedom wherever it harms the community.

The word "indulgence" generally triggers positive associations in us, and everybody has their own quite personal idea of what indulgence is. There are many things to indulge in, but what they all have in common is that they stimulate the brain's limbic system – the "reward system". This releases hormones that create a sense of wellbeing and make us want to repeat the act that triggered this feeling. If we try to imagine a life without such feelings, we immediately realise that they, or in other words, the ability to indulge, are indispensable for a fulfilled life. However, the limbic system developed at a time which, compared with the present day, offered little in the way of indulgence and in which scarcity predominated. Thus, there was little likelihood of negative effects from an excessive pursuit of pleasure.

Scarcity then, excess today

If early times were characterised by scarcity, our problem today is rather one of excess – not in the form of an excess of food, but of many other stimuli that promise us enjoyment but are also associated with risks. Nowadays, everything we need and much that we do not need is available at any time, at least in the first world. So if somebody who is driven by the pursuit of a sense of wellbeing has to exist in a world that is not forced by scarcity to set natural boundaries, then it is not surprising that problems arise. Thanks to cognitive skills located in the cortex, an organ that is very

k, or why indulgence has a preventive effect



ders are preconditions of a fulfilled life. To deal with the pleasure and its limits means a lifelong balancing act.

young in terms of evolution, human beings are basically able to recognise that over-indulgence is unhealthy. Unfortunately, this insight conflicts with other patterns of behaviour that have been shaped over hundreds of thousands of years and under quite different environmental conditions.

It could be said, though in very simplified terms, that in the human brain a constant struggle rages between the limbic system, which is, in a manner of speaking, geared to pleasure, and the cortical system, which wants to set limits to this pursuit of pleasure because it has learned that excess goes hand in hand with great risks and their negative consequences.

As a brief digression into the world of Greek philosophy shows, however, it is not just since neuroscientific imaging procedures gave us a clear idea of how our brain functions that this struggle has engaged the attention of mankind.

As far back as Epicurus, we find texts showing that the pursuit of pleasure is very important for a fulfilled life but also entails great risks: "No pleasure is in itself a bad thing, but the things that produce some kinds of pleasure bring along with them unpleasantness that is much greater than the pleasure itself." Epicurus therefore always recommends calling desires into question: "What will happen to me if my desire is fulfilled and what will happen if it is not?" These two quotations from the third century BC contain everything modern prevention is about. On the one hand, there is the positive attitude of enjoying life to the full with all our senses and, on the other, the awareness that boundaries need to be set to the pursuit of pleasure on account of the associated risks.

Individual needs and the rules of the community

What is needed, then, is for society as a whole and its individual members to learn how to cope with the pleasures of this world in a way that is responsible, i.e. low-risk. In other words, they must be able to indulge without causing health, social or economic difficulties. The problem is that this learning pro-

cess inevitably confronts us with the question as to whether, and to what extent, interventions in personal and individual freedoms are necessary and justified.

The obvious importance we attach to this issue is demonstrated by society's very lively debate about the extent to which individuals can be allowed to indulge their personal pursuit of pleasure to the detriment of society and about when and how this pursuit can be controlled by preventive or repressive measures.

A modern approach to prevention must therefore not confine itself to warning against dangers and issuing threats of sanctions, but must seek to empower people to develop skills in dealing with the rich array of available pleasures and the risks these carry. In other words, people's ability to cope with indulgence needs to be promoted.

This calls for a thorough knowledge of the positive and negative aspects of the different things in which people can indulge. A further indispensable precondition of this ability is self-control, i.e. we have to learn not only where our boundaries lie but also how to respect them.

Self-control and structural conditions

Though self-control is important and fostering it is a key requirement of behavioural prevention, we also need to

increase people's awareness that there are limits to self-control. Who among us has never experienced situations in which we simply cannot say "No". This is generally not a problem and may even be enjoyable, but it does not alter the fact that we are able to control our impulses only up to a certain point.

An awareness of the limited nature of self-control can teach us to avoid situations which we know from experience that we cannot resist. But it can also cause us to conclude that we, as individuals, are out of our depth and that in certain circumstances it might be a good thing if structural conditions were changed so that certain situations would no longer occur or would at least do so less frequently. This means that, as a society, we have to create structural conditions that help us make the healthier choice.

However, in a free society the setting of limits to personal freedom of enjoyment can never be an end in itself, but must always serve the purpose of improving the conditions that allow people to enjoy fulfilled lives. If we succeed, then we are making an important contribution to public health – because people with the ability to indulge in moderation also live healthier lives.

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At first hand

Addiction and indulgence – both concepts arouse emotions and personal memories in all of us. But at a more rational level, it is hard for us to pin down exactly what indulgence and addiction are. It is no easier for the experts. But they at least agree that the transition from indulgence to addiction cannot be precisely defined. This makes the grey in-between zone, the diffuse demarcation line that separates pleasurable, moderate, risk-free indulgence from compulsively excessive, health-endangering over-indulgence an interesting but challenging question for government efforts to prevent addiction.

At what point does indulgence turn into dependence that destroys the original pleasure? As we all know, the answer depends very much on the mental and physical effects of the individual legal or illegal substances associated with highs, e.g. caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, cannabis, heroin or cocaine, and on the physical and mental state of each individual and on his or her level of social integration. Cultural distinctions that shape society's tolerance of one or the other of the substances in the different countries also play a role. However, none of this changes the fact that, even without a scientifically defined demarcation line, we all know intuitively whether indulgence in something beguiles our senses or whether we are in the process of crossing a line. Somewhere along the way, over-indulgence becomes uncontrollable and eventually turns into addiction.

Efforts to prevent addiction are as complex as the reality of the condition. They are not confined to the classic drugs. Work mania, compulsive gambling, constant peering at a mobile phone or tablet, even excessive sporting activity – they all contain the seeds of potential addiction. In today's fast-moving world, and given the hectic pace of everyday life, it has perhaps become difficult to enjoy "normal" activities that are also good for us when we indulge in them to the full. Sitting back, slowing down, breathing deeply, reading a good book, listening to music, going for a long walk, having discussions with friends – such relaxing pleasures are probably the best means of preventing addiction.



Pascal Strupler
Director,
Federal Office of Public Health

"More than half of all non-communicable diseases could be prevented by a healthy lifestyle."

Five questions to Eva Bruhin. Non-communicable diseases are now the number-one cause of death worldwide. The increase is due primarily to lifestyle changes. Eva Bruhin, Head, Administrative Office of the "National Strategy on Non-communicable Diseases" at the Federal Office of Public Health, talks about the goals of this strategy.

Non-communicable diseases, NCDs for short, have recently become a focus of intense interest in the healthcare and prevention sector. Have NCDs become more widespread?

Improved living conditions and advances in medical care have led to an impressive rise in life expectancy. However, this often means longer lifetimes overshadowed by chronic health problems, particularly in the elderly. Non-communicable, chronic diseases are of long duration and generally slow progression, and require care for periods ranging from several months to decades. They include cardiovascular diseases, cancer, respiratory diseases, diabetes and musculoskeletal diseases (conditions of the locomotor system such as chronic back pain).

In Switzerland, 74.6 percent of fatalities among men and 75.9 percent of those among women are due to four NCDs: cardiovascular diseases, cancer, respiratory diseases and dementia (Federal Statistical Office, 2013).

Why do we actually need a national strategy on NCDs?

Because we cannot simply stand by and watch non-communicable diseases increase without doing anything. More than half of all non-communicable diseases could be prevented by a healthy lifestyle. They are promoted by the following risk factors: an unbalanced diet, lack of physical activity, alcohol abuse and smoking. So we really can do something about them. Health policy must focus on investing in the prevention of non-communicable diseases and in health promotion.

Since 2008, there have been three national prevention programmes in Switzerland that target the main risk factors of non-communicable diseases: the tobacco, alcohol and diet & physical activity programmes. They constitute an umbrella for the different national, cantonal and municipal prevention activities in these fields and are implemented in cooperation with the cantons, NGOs and – in accordance with the multisectoral approach – additional players from fields such as spatial development, business or education. However, these programmes only run until 2016. We therefore have to think today about how we should proceed in future. This is why



the "Dialogue on National Healthcare Policy" – a permanent platform of the Federal Government and the cantons – decided at the end of November that work should start on drawing up a national strategy for the prevention of non-communicable diseases, to be completed by 2016. The aim of the strategy is to improve the health literacy of the population and create general conditions that make it easier for people to live in a healthy manner.

Alternative question: in which areas will the new strategy have an impact?

The NCD Strategy is a cross-sectoral strategy designed to improve prevention

of the most widespread non-communicable diseases. The WHO defines cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases as the four main types of NCD. Because of the specific situation in Switzerland, the national strategy additionally requires the inclusion of musculoskeletal diseases (see figure). The NCD Strategy encompasses health promotion and primary prevention and has an interface with medical care. It thus establishes a link to early identification and early intervention in individuals with increased health risks, and to preventive services in integrated healthcare management aimed at improving patients' quality of life.

But the strategy is not a substitute for disease-specific strategies or programmes, for instance in the field of cancer; it supplements them and reinforces their preventive effect. The areas of addiction and mental health are to be developed separately, with coordination of the interfaces.

The Federal Government is launching the strategy in cooperation with the cantons. Which other partners are being invited to take part? What role will

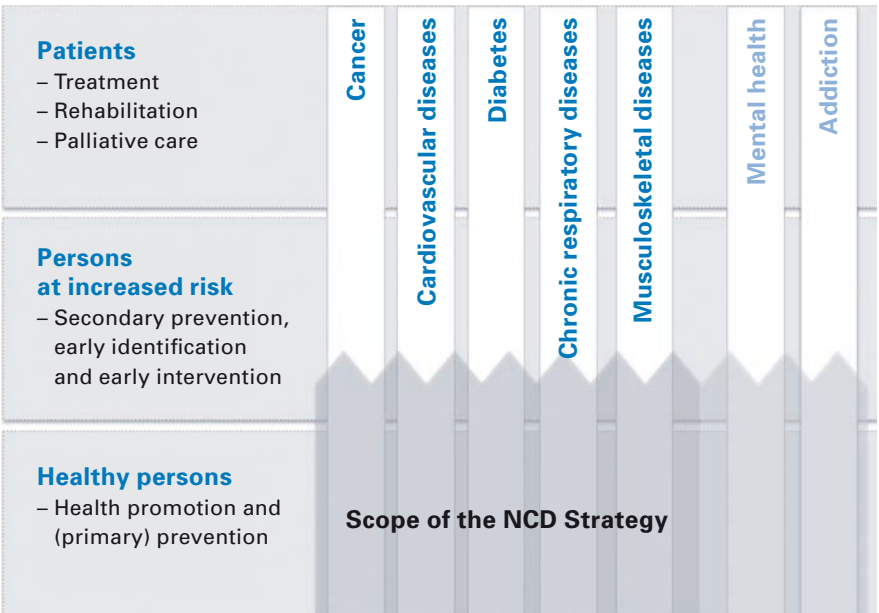
Health Promotion Switzerland play?

The development process is designed to function in both a top-down and bottom-up manner. The Confederation, cantons and Health Promotion Switzerland are represented in the executive committee. The extended executive committee also includes NGOs, research experts and additional players. Also, the individual project work streams are being drawn up by working groups in which the different players can participate. An initial information event, at which the content of the strategy and work streams, the project structure and the development timetable will be presented and discussed, is to be held in Berne on 31 March 2014. All interested partners are welcome to take part; they should register by sending an e-mail to ncd-mnt@bag.admin.ch.

How will current prevention programmes be integrated into the strategy? Is it to act as an umbrella for all existing programmes? Will some programmes be replaced?

The existing programmes were extended by the Federal Council to the end of 2016. This means that the continuity and sustainability of prevention work have been safeguarded and cooperation between all prevention players can be further strengthened.

However, the increase in non-communicable diseases requires comprehensive approaches that go beyond prevention geared to risk factors. International developments such as the WHO's efforts in this field demonstrate such an approach. The focus has to be on improving prevention and early identification of non-communicable diseases. There is also a need for much closer cooperation between the Federal Government, cantons and NGOs. It goes without saying that the experience and knowledge generated by the existing programmes will feed into the development of the new strategy. But I cannot yet say whether or in what form the programmes will be continued from 2017 on.



NCD Strategy: the main facts in brief

- The Federal Government and the cantons are jointly drawing up a new strategy for preventing non-communicable diseases (called the NCD Strategy for short).
- The NCD Strategy encompasses the prevention of cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular, respiratory and musculoskeletal diseases.
- The NCD Strategy is a cross-sectoral strategy that does not compete with existing disease-specific sub-strategies but improves prevention-related aspects, identifies opportunities for the further development of national and cantonal prevention programmes (alcohol, tobacco, and diet & physical activity) and of health promotion, and strengthens prevention in primary healthcare.
- The NCD Strategy attaches great importance to the inclusion and participation of specialist and support organisations.
- The areas of addiction and mental health are to be developed separately, with coordination of the interfaces.

Information event on the NCD Strategy:
31 March 2014, registration:
ncd-mnt@bag.admin.ch

Further information:
www.bag.admin.ch/ncd
Order newsletter:
e-mail to ncd-mnt@bag.admin.ch