SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND HEALTH PROMOTION: AN ESSENTIAL ALLIANCE AGAINST CHRONIC DISEASES

OBJETIVOS DO DESENVOLVIMENTO SUSTENTÁVEL E PROMOÇÃO DA SAÚDE: UMA ALIANÇA NECESSÁRIA AO ENFRENTAMENTO DAS DOENÇAS CRÔNICAS

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ABSTRACT

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) have been a priority agenda for building an equal and just society, which will directly impact the approach to chronic health conditions. This study aimed to analyze how the SDG outline the adoption of health promotion measures capable of impacting chronic diseases. This narrative literature review was based on the theoretical framework of the SDG and recommendations from global conferences on health promotion held over the last decades. The SDG can be approached from two perspectives: contextual, which is represented by the challenges of contemporary society; and discussions about the role of health professionals. Considering the complexity of health and its social determinants, effective health promotion should not rely solely on the dissemination of information and self-care from an individual perspective.

Keywords: Health promotion; Health determinants; Sustainable development

RESUMO

Os Objetivos do Desenvolvimento Sustentável (ODS) têm sido apontados como uma agenda prioritária para a construção de uma sociedade mais igualitária e socialmente justa. Constituem-se numa agenda cujos resultados terão repercussão direta na abordagem das condições crônicas. O objetivo do presente estudo foi analisar como os ODS delineiam a adoção de medidas de promoção de saúde capazes de produzir impacto nas doenças crônicas. Trata-se de uma revisão de literatura narrativa a partir do referencial teórico dos ODS e das recomendações das conferências mundiais de promoção de saúde realizadas nas últimas décadas. Conclui-se que os ODS podem ser trabalhados em duas dimensões: uma contextual, representada pelos desafios postos pela contemporaneidade, e outra relativa à discussão sobre o papel dos profissionais de saúde. Considerando a saúde na sua complexidade, envolvida e relacionada com determinantes sociais, reforça-se que não é possível promover a saúde apenas transmitindo informação e buscando o autocuidado numa perspectiva individual.

Palavras-chave: Promoção de saúde; Determinantes de saúde; Desenvolvimento sustentável

CHALLENGES OF THE CONTEMPORARY PERIOD FOR HEALTH

Considering the new Anthropocene era characterized by significant human impact on the planet at a socio-environmental level, discussing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and health promotion is crucial for professional training and individual life to highlight opportunities and challenges in protecting life and health.

Challenges related to health include epidemiological, demographic, and nutritional transitions in the current generation. Increased life expectancy, premature mortality rates, and decreased fertility rates highlight new profiles for healthcare. Also, nutritional transition reflects lifestyle changes, including increased sedentary behavior, changes in dietary patterns and food production methods and distribution, and a tendency to reduce malnutrition and increase obesity. In Brazil, overweight affects 54% of adults and 34% of children, significantly impacting chronic diseases[1].

Additional challenges are involved in the

transitional processes, including urbanization and industrialization and their impacts on the lives of individuals and health of the Brazilian population. In Latin America, 80% of the population resides in urban areas, and nearly 90% of Brazilians are expected to live in these areas by 2050, representing a considerable demographic increase. This increase intensifies the demand for essential resources for adequate living (e.g., access to water, sewage, security, and healthcare services) and results in behavioral changes. Thus, these changes may lead to excessive consumption, exploitation of natural resources and workers, and loss of protections for social security.

Violence is another significant health-related challenge. Epidemiological data revealed a sharp increase in chronic health conditions associated with insecurity and domestic and traffic-related violence. For example, traffic accidents are the leading cause of death among Brazilians aged 15 to 29 years.

Environmental degradation, evidenced by increased pollution, wildfires, floods, and droughts, is among the challenges that must be addressed. Climate change (which is not merely in weather patterns) reflects the impact of human activity on the environment and is emerging as a distinct risk factor for the development of chronic health conditions and diseases.

Beyond inequalities, inequities (i.e., unjust inequalities that could be addressed through collective protection policies) represent a contemporary challenge with impact on health and the incidence of chronic health conditions. A recent World Bank report warned about the increase in poverty in Brazil, where over 43 million people live with less than $5.00 per day, with numbers continuing to increase. This situation requires a critical evaluation of public policies or the lack thereof. Inequities within urban spaces should be observed, tackling what some authors have called urban penalty[2], which exacerbates risks and health issues within city living spaces. For instance, individuals living in the periphery of São Paulo (Brazil) die about 20 years earlier than individuals living in central areas of this city. This disparity reflects not only biological risk factors but also unequal access to quality healthcare services and inequities in the distribution of power, information, financial resources, and access to and availability of technologies.

Inequities in access to health technologies are evident among healthcare professionals and the general population. Despite significant advances, the distribution of these technologies is inversely related to health needs and remains concentrated among the wealthiest[3]. These inequities impact access to science, technology, and innovation, including new drugs, diagnostic tools, new ideas, institutional arrangements, and practical innovations.

Basu and Stuckler (2014)4, in their book entitled "The Body Economic: Why Austerity Kills", discussed how inhumane economic policies, such as economic austerity, have harmed public health across different contemporary societies. Also, their analysis of the global financial crisis, income distribution, and healthcare investments demonstrated how economic decisions affect health worldwide, including Brazil.

In this sense, understanding contemporary global challenges allows for a broad contextualization of healthcare, highlighting new questions, opportunities, and responsibilities for health professionals and their role in society.

HEALTH AGENDAS AND THE ROLE OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Effective and high-quality healthcare practices require that the training of health professionals goes beyond the treatment of acute diseases and emergency care. In Brazil, healthcare professionals often manage acute and chronic conditions within the same outpatient unit; thus, competencies need to be developed to address chronic health conditions adequately.

In this article, the term chronic health conditions was used to expand the concept of chronic diseases since many chronic conditions requiring specialized healthcare are not diseases, such as pregnancy. Considering that pregnancy requires person-centered care focusing on women health throughout its course, it is described as a chronic health condition.

Regarding the global rise in chronic health conditions, the impact of poverty and health inequities should be considered on their development and management. Growing evidence have supported health institutions in reconsidering the direct relationship and impact of life context, development, and socio-environmental determinants on population health. Also, the World Health Organization has promoted international agendas that focus on the im-

pacts of these factors on health, encouraging international mobilization of efforts to develop healthcare systems based on socio-environmental determinants of health and disease.

In this context, the SDG[5] emerged as a strategy reflecting the converging agendas that have worked over the past few years toward the eradication of the main determinants of living conditions. The SDG are presented as an action plan to eradicate poverty, safeguard the planet, and promote human development in an environment of prosperity and peace.

Member states of the United Nations defined this global agenda in September 2015 and signed an agreement to intentionally develop proposals and practices for modifying poverty profiles and promoting sustainable human development. This agenda has spread worldwide, aiming to address 17 goals, 169 associated targets, and 231 indicators, directing governments, societies, and international organizations to develop concrete action plans. The SDG were designed around five critical dimensions for the protection of life: people, focused on poverty eradication, hunger control, and access to quality education to ensure dignity and equity; planet, focused on safeguarding the planet, natural resources, and climate; prosperity, ensuring fulfilling lives in harmony with nature; peace, focused on promoting peace in just and inclusive societies; and partnership, focused on developing partnerships for implementation of solid global action. Thus, the SDG agenda is focused on collective and intersectional approaches to improve equity. Also, it recognizes that addressing the risks associated with how humans currently live on the planet requires the development of strategies that involve different sectors of society to mitigate global inequities, which have a significant impact on the potential for human development and health. The SDG are often called the 2030 agenda since they are defined to be reached by 2030.

In 2018, a Brazilian commission was organized to discuss and adapt these goals and associated targets. Thus, the commission expanded the associated targets from 169 to 175 for the Brazilian context, with technical support from the Institute for Applied Economic Research. Also, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics committed to monitoring advances and tracking indicators on a dedicated page on its website.

The central role of health in the SDG agenda is highlighted by the three core dimensions of sustainable human development (i.e., social, environmental, and economic) and other dimensions of development (e.g., psychological and relational), requiring commitment and intersectional approaches. Therefore, health professionals and citizens living from the South to Northeast of Brazil must engage in collective action plans, identifying potentialities to reduce inequities and construct a promising future for life on the planet.

Health professionals should emphasize the connection between health and human development by focusing on individuals and their lives within this context. In addition, they should evaluate how each individual experiences their development process, analyzing their potential to build a positive life with culture and protection of peaceful contexts, including a life without violence and with a supportive perspective.

In this sense, recognizing the complexity of health implies addressing the social determinants of health and understanding the factors that influence staying healthy or falling ill in the contemporary world. Therefore, addressing socio-environmental determinants as key factors in health is a complex task and the main challenge in healthcare.

A variety of international and national health agendas and movements have addressed issues related to the social determinants of health, outlining strategies for addressing inequities. Key discussions included the importance of primary health care in Alma-Ata (Alma-Ata Declaration of 1978), First International Conference on Health Promotion, starting in 1986, development of the principles of the Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS) in the Brazilian Constitution, and recommendations from international and Brazilian commissions on social determinants of health and National Health Promotion Policy. These movements have reinforced the importance of comprehensive, intersectoral actions that prioritize equity, ensuring quality of life and health for all.

Chart 1 highlights some of these movements with significant resonance in Brazil and their recommendations for addressing health inequities.

Chart 1. Movements and events on social determinants of health and recommendations for addressing health inequities.

Year	Event	Recommendations
2000	International commission affiliated with the World Health Organization to discuss health inequalities and inequities.	Recommended actions guiding efforts on social determinants and reducing inequities: improve daily living conditions; address the unequal distribution of power, money, and resources; and analyze and understand the problem by assessing the impact of actions.
2000	Brazilian Commission on Social Determinants of Health.	Recommend working in three major areas to reduce health inequities in Brazil: focus on intersectoral work; strengthen social participation as a central issue; and develop actions based on scientific evidence.
2006/2014	National Health Promotion Policy	Recommended promoting structural changes in environments and establishing legislative and regulatory measures and policies to guarantee access to health in Brazil.
2016	9th International Conference on Health Promotion – China.	Recommended focusing on the key areas for health promotion: good government, health literacy, and healthy cities.
2016	22nd International Union on Health Promotion and Education World Conference on Health Promotion – Curitiba.	Recommended expanding the discussion on health promotion and building equity.

The principles of SUS (i.e., universality, integrality, and equity in care and social participation) are the foundation for the National Health Promotion Policy. This policy guides actions that target the social determinants of health, the pursuit of equity, respect for diversity, sustainable development, and inclusive and solidarity-based promotion of health and care.

The World Conference on Health Promotion held in Curitiba in 2016[6] was another important milestone for health promotion and equity. It highlighted for professionals involved in health promotion the urgent need to change care practices, from a biomedical model to a socio-environmental perspective, considering social justice and democracy as essential values for health promotion. In this comprehensive perspective, promoting health and sustainable development in Brazil requires defending SUS, democracy, and equity. Thus, contemporary health professionals must learn to address new and longstanding issues in diverse contexts, recognize vulnerable individuals, reconsider health technologies, cities, and collective living spaces, and collaborate with different people and institutions to influence social determinants of health. This perspective for developing professional competencies highlights not only technical skills but also critical reflection and transformative action within society.

Health professionals must evaluate the impact of economic factors and austerity policies on health outcomes and develop models for care and service management that address vulnerabilities to propose new strategies and ensure the quality of health services. Moreover, they must analyze the value and impact of health promotion practices with effectiveness within the local context and engage in intersectoral actions that extend health promotion efforts beyond traditional sector boundaries.

As researchers, contemporary health professionals must commit to producing knowledge that transforms reality and addresses the challenges faced by society. Therefore, scientific production must result in knowledge that contributes to sustainable development and health promotion without losing time.

Academic training should be centered on health promotion and sustainable development, which requires overcoming conceptual imprecision, particularly regarding inequities, sustainable development, and health determinants and promotion. Health professionals can no longer view health promotion solely as health education and behavior change since this is only one dimension of health promotion. Health should be understood as a complex phenomenon strongly influenced by social determinants. Thus, promoting health and sustainable development involves supporting empowered and resilient individuals, building people-centered health systems, and acting comprehensively to transform living environments.

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