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Fall 11-17-2013

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Health and Nutrition Education in Czech Republic

Jana Koptíková, Visiting Scholar



ABSTRACT

The average one-year health expenditure per capita in the European member states has doubled in the last 15 years. Prevention is less expensive than treatment, and changes in diet and lifestyle remain the most effective way to reduce the financial health care costs. However, European health systems are primarily treatment systems, not preventive systems. Improper diet and lack of physical activity are the most critical factors contributing to the overweight and obesity pandemic. Along with heavy alcohol consumption and smoking, these four factors contribute the most to the development of chronic non-communicable diseases. These diseases kill more than 36 million people worldwide annually, with more than 9,000,000 deaths occurring before the sixtieth year of life. In 2008, The Czech Republic government responded to the deteriorating financial health care situation by installing fees for medical services. In 2004, the Czech Republic Government utilized preventive services by introducing the new educational field of Health Education to the public school curriculum for pre-school, primary, and secondary education. The fundamental role of the Health Education Curriculum is performed through primary education (the only required stage of education for all Czech students). Nutrition Education is a necessary tool in shaping lifelong positive behaviors of students, leading to actively promoting and maintaining health. Nutrition Education is delivered through the Expected Outcomes and Prescribed Curriculum, which are mandatory for the implementation in Czech schools. Czech educators gained the freedom as well as responsibility to determine how to meet the prescribed curriculum.

METHODS

This study's primary focus is to analyze The Framework Educational Programs for primary education (FEP PE) in Czech Republic focusing to Nutrition Education. FEP PE is a key tool for educators in class preparation and realization of Health Education and Nutrition Education. Czech educators became independent to comply the prescribed curriculum for all lectures, but as they gained the freedom they became more responsible for the design of lectures that would meet the prescribed curriculum.

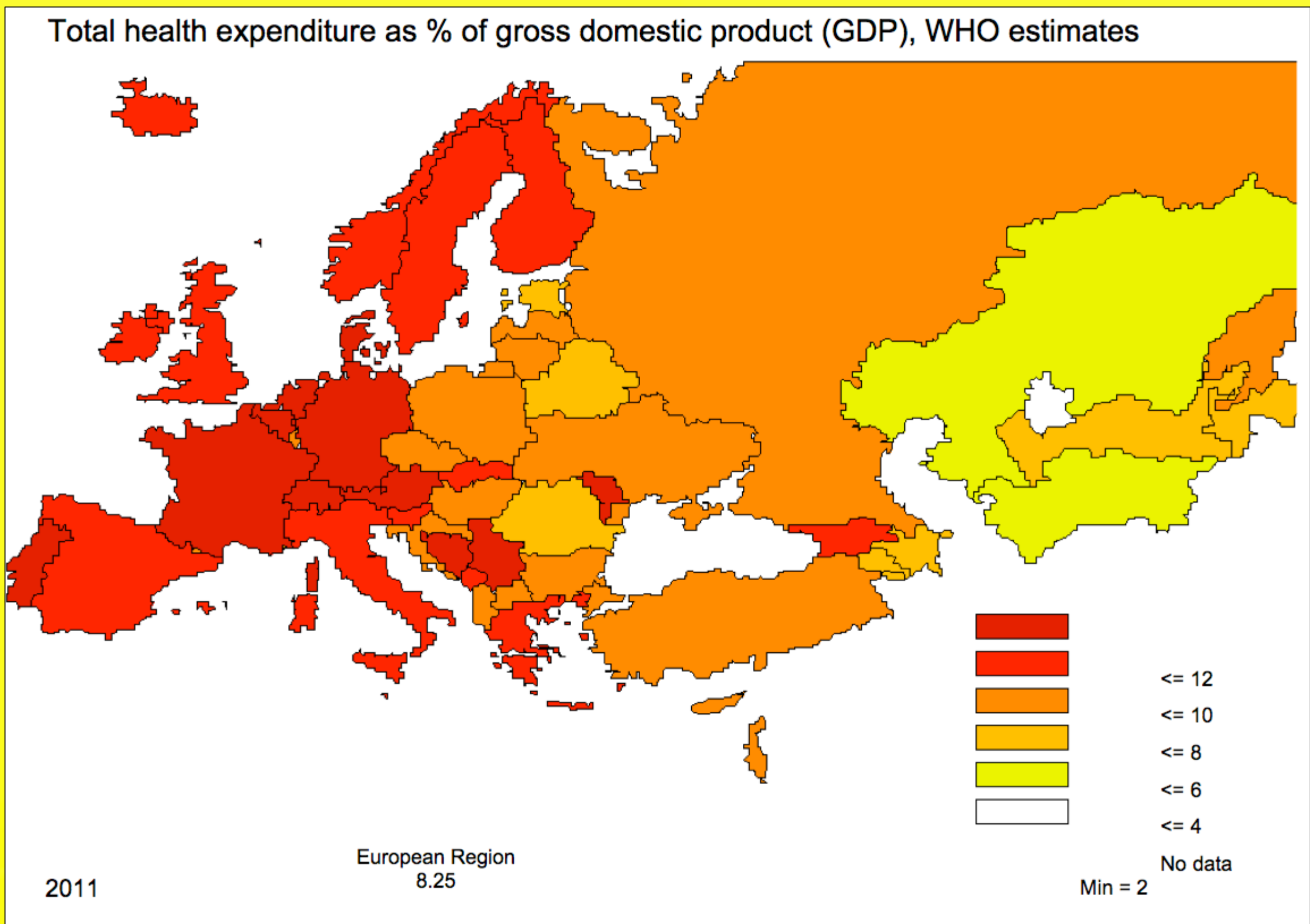


Figure 1: Percentage of total health expenditure of gross domestic product per capita of European countries for 2011 (Source: WHO / Europe, European HFA Database, July 2013)

RESULTS: EXAMPLE OF NUTRITION EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The Educational area	CURRICULUM LINKS	EXPECTED OUTCOMES
HUMAN AND HIS/HER WORLD	health care, healthy nutrition - daily routines, fluid intake, exercise regime, healthy diet plants, mushrooms and animals - signs of life, needs of life and manifestations of life; lifestyle, nutrition, body structure of familiar animals; the importance of plants, mushrooms and animals for people	student: - applies essential skills and habits related to health promotion and prevention
HUMAN AND HEALTH	nutrition and health - the principles of healthy eating, the influence of environment and diet on health, eating disorders lifestyle diseases - health risk factors, prevention and treatment holistic understanding of human in health and disease - health components and their interactions, basic human needs and their hierarchy (Maslow's theory)	student: - understands the relationship between the diet and eating habits and the development of lifestyle diseases and applies healthy eating habits as much as possible
HUMAN AND SOCIETY	new Europe political organization and the role of U.S.A. in the world – the formation of Czechoslovakia, its economic and political development, social and national problems	student: - explains the importance of agriculture for humans, as well as animal husbandry and processing of metals

BACKGROUND

Health and healthy lifestyle are an essential constituent part of quality life and successful living. Healthy diet and proper eating habits are critical for healthy lifestyle and status of health in all aspects - physical, mental and social components. The rapid rise of health-care expenditures has been recorded (WHO, 2013) in the European Region during the recent decades. The average medical cost per European inhabitant increased from 1054.5 USD (in 1996) to 2373.4 USD (2011). This acceleration predicts strong economic utilization across the European Region, especially in countries with the largest increase of the expenses on medical care, such as Denmark, Belgium or Romania. Financial cost of health care in the Czech Republic per capita falls within the European average (Figure 1). Improper diet and lack of physical activity are the main contributors to unhealthy lifestyle of society and the most critical factors contributing to the overweight and obesity pandemic. According to an estimate (WHO, 2013) 72.3% of men and 60.3% of women in Czech Republic aged 20 years and older are overweight or obese and 30.5% of boys and 26.5% of girls in Czech Republic younger than 20 years are obese (are greater than or equal to a Body Mass Index ≥ 30). Up to 80 % of heart disease, stroke, type 2 Diabetes and 40% of cancers could be avoided if risk factors of common lifestyle such as unhealthy diet were eliminated. Good nutrition is essential for survival, physical growth, mental development, performance, productivity, health and well-being across the entire life-span: from the earliest stages of fetal development, at birth, and through infancy, childhood, adolescence and on to adulthood (WHO, 2013).

PROFILE OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM

According to WHO, Health Education is any combination of learning experiences designed to help individuals and communities improve their health, by increasing their knowledge or influencing their attitudes. The quality of education and training is a matter of national importance in each country. Quality assurance is a collective responsibility of the academic community, health systems, regulatory authorities and governments of every nation (WHO, 2013). The educational content of primary education in Czech Republic is divided into nine educational areas. Each educational area is made up of either one major educational field, or of more interlinked educational disciplines. One of these areas - *Human and health area* consists of a branch of Health Education and a branch of Physical Education. Nutrition Education is an important issue of Health Education. The field of nutrition is also implemented in the educational areas of *Human and his/her World*, *Human and Nature*, *Human and World of Work* and *Human and Society* beside *Human and Health area*. Nutrition Education is being delivered through the Expected Outcomes and Prescribed Curriculum. Expected Outcomes are a crucial part of the educational content. It sets the mandatory standards, which are supposed to be met by all pupils during their education. The prescribed Curriculum presents topics, which should be used as an instrument to achieve the expected outcomes. Teachers are obliged to incorporate the suggested topics in the education process to meet the Expected Outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS

The Nutrition Education Curriculum undertakes each educator to meet the requirements, but lacks to provide sufficient educational materials, which would help to implement the right tools to reach goals of education. Nutritional Educational curriculum for grammar schools in Czech Republic calls for specific suggestions of what to teach and how to teach. It would help to fulfill prescribed subject matter of curriculum properly, broaden Nutrition Education by incorporating of missing topics and promote proper diet effectively.

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