



The Happy Life Club

A Monash University
international initiative on
chronic disease management

Introduction

Over the last 10 years chronic disease prevention and management has emerged as a critical issue in the health of populations. In Australia the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission's (2009, p.113) highlighted '... the tsunami of chronic disease that poses new challenges for how we organise and provide health services in a way that best meets peoples' needs ...'.

In many but by no means all countries chronic disease care is managed in primary care settings. The relevant clinical guidelines recognise the importance of structured and systematic care and monitoring that involves a care team as well as involving patients in the management of the condition. As lifestyle changes are fundamental to the management of many chronic diseases, the health care team heavily utilises counselling and behaviour change skills to work with the patient to achieve their goals. Unfortunately clinician skills in these areas are often limited. It has been recognised that training in tailored approaches to counselling provided by techniques such as motivational interviewing (MI) have a great potential to improve lifestyle changes in people with chronic illnesses.

In Australia, our research team at Monash University has successfully conducted large-scale clinical programs with patients with diabetes in primary care settings as part of the Sharing Healthcare Initiative. The 'Good Life Club', diabetes self-management program conducted by the Whitehorse Division of General Practice with academic leadership from staff now at Monash University incorporated a behaviour change approach and counselling techniques. It showed significant improvements in self management as well as a net benefit of \$A16,000 per participant per annum though enhanced health and reduced health care costs when subjected to health economics modelling (Browning & Thomas, 2003; Kelly, Menzies & Taylor, 2003; Mortimer & Kelly, 2006).

In recent years we have been working with our Chinese colleagues in the introduction of the 'Happy Life Club', a very large-scale diabetes self-management program, in Beijing. Initially the intervention was conducted in Fangzhuang, a large residential area of Beijing. The program has now extended to the larger Fengtai district of Beijing with plans for further extension to other Chinese cities and regions including Malaysia and Hong Kong. The program has the formal support of the Chinese Ministry of Health and will soon be delivered to 20,000 participants in a large-scale clinical trial under the academic leadership of Browning, Thomas and Yang at Monash. The program has delivered significant research outcomes and is a model for translational research.

The term Happy Life Club™ is subject to trademark protection applications in Australia, Hong Kong, China and Malaysia.

The Happy Life Club™

Thus the Happy Life Club™ is the trademark of an initiative led by staff at Monash University that uses doctor and nurse coaches to assist patients better manage their chronic illnesses using a motivational interviewing framework to assist with behaviour

change in key targeted health behaviours. Motivational interviewing is a directive, client-centred counselling style for eliciting behaviour change by helping clients to explore and resolve ambivalence. It involves a complex set of skills that grow and develop through disciplined practice with feedback and coaching from a knowledgeable guide.

The Club incorporates a training program where health coaches receive intensive face-to-face training in the principles of behaviour change and motivational interviewing supported by an extensive coach manual. The program design is based on a stages of change model and patient-centred principles of healthcare. The Club also includes a series of research activities including a randomised controlled trial (Chapman, Browning, Thomas & Yang, 2010), and quality improvement activities to assist health planners in healthcare quality improvement to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of the initiative.

The Happy Life Club™ in China

China has a rapidly ageing population. By 2030 one in four people will be aged 60 years or older. As noted by the WHO in China “Population ageing leads to a shift towards chronic diseases and disabilities and pressures on the health system to address more complex health conditions that generate higher costs”. In addition to an ageing profile, changes in lifestyle practices have promoted higher rates of conditions including diabetes and cardiovascular disease. China has the largest number of people with diabetes (92.4 million), according to International Diabetes Federation (2010). Fu and Fung’s (2004) studies of the cardiovascular health of residents in selected metropolitan cities in China found that 72.2 per cent of Beijing residents had three or more cardiovascular heart disease risk factors.

The health system in China is exploring innovative ways to respond to the ‘tsunami’ of chronic disease. In 2007, we met with health officials to brief them about our approach in Australia and it was agreed that our approach would be localised in China. A series of preparative activities was conducted following the initial agreement and the program was formally launched in April 2009 in Beijing. For more information see

- <http://www.monash.edu.au/news/monashmemo/assets/includes/content/20100630/stories-more-uni-news1.html>,
- <http://www.monash.edu.au/pubs/monmag/issue25-2010/inbrief/happy-days.html>
- <http://www.monash.edu.au/news/newslines/story/1444>

The Club is a partnership between the Fangzhuang Community Hospital, community health organisations in the Fengtai District, the Fengtai District Government, the Beijing Government and the China Ministry of Health. Monash University, Peking University and the Australian Psychological Society are providing expert technical support to the Club.

The Club is presently focussed on Chinese adults (age 55+) with diabetes. It will be expanded to other chronic illnesses such as hypertension, cardiovascular conditions and cancer.

The Happy Life Club™ is facilitated in Beijing by Dr Zhi Xin Li who has a leadership position in the Fengtai Centre of Disease Control and Prevention. Dr Li is a former student of Professor Thomas and Dr Yang. Professor Colette Browning from Monash University is the overall project leader. The evaluation is led by Professor Colette Browning in conjunction with Dr Yang Hui and Professor Shane Thomas from Monash University and Professor Tuohong Zhang from Peking University.

Achievements

Health policy translation: The Happy Life Club has attracted considerable attention from the Chinese media (more than 120 media reports nationwide, including China Health Daily, Beijing Times, and China Central Television) and it was nominated by the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the only health innovations project that was featured in the recent 60th anniversary celebrations of the establishment of the People's Republic. The Happy Life Club initiative is recognised as having important implications for the health and well-being of the Chinese people. It uses leading evidence based technologies to deliver its benefits.

We consider the acceptance of this work in China arises from several reasons. It switches the focus of healthcare from a narrow medical focus on chronic diseases to incorporate behavioural and psychological approaches to their management in primary care settings. It promotes capacity building in community health by training doctors and nurses in patient-centred and communication skills. It contributes to the development of Chinese community health policy by focusing on promoting physical, mental and social health.

Technical outcomes: The Happy Life Health Coach Manual was developed for the Happy Life Club. The Manual includes the coach training program, readings, audio-video materials and worksheets. It also incorporates evaluation methods and quality improvement approaches. It will be used in Australia, China, Malaysia, Hong Kong and other countries.

Research achievements: Professor Shane Thomas and Professor Colette Browning designed the program evaluation plan. For the Fangzhuang arm of the Happy Life Club, the 6-month evaluation of the Club has been completed and the 12-month data collection was recently completed. The 18-month data will be collected in early 2011.

Based on the 6-month evaluation, participants improved their mental health, well-being and quality of life, patients engaged in more appropriate health resource utilisation, and engaged in more active disease management behaviours. Clinical indicators also improved.

The research findings have been published in international conferences:

- 27th International Congress of Applied Psychology

- 7th Beijing International Conference of General Practice

We have many publications from the Happy Life Club.

Further steps: challenges and opportunities

The Fangzhuang Beijing arm of the Happy Life Club in has been expanded to a larger community overseen by the Fengtai Administration in Beijing. Within the next three years the Club will be implemented in 23 community health centres in Beijing with over 200 health coaches undergoing training. Recently we have been asked to assist colleagues from other Chinese cities including Nanjing and Shenzhen to establish the Happy Life Club in their jurisdictions. We are currently developing the Happy Life Club for implementation in Australia and are seeking research grants through the NHMRC and ARC as well as from international Foundations to support the work in China, Malaysia and Australia.

Relevant Associated Publications

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