*Sport and Health*

*During recent decades, there has been a progressive decline in the level of physical activity in people's daily lives in developed countries. For a majority of people, little physical effort is involved any more in their work, domestic chores, transportation and leisure. Whilst specific health risks differ between countries and regions, the fact remains that physical inactivity is a major risk factor for most common non-communicable diseases and physical activity can counteract many of the ill effects of inactivity*.

**The health benefits of sport and physical activity.**

*Although research interest on physical activity and health dates back to the 1950s, the breakthrough in the scientific evidence on health benefits of physical activity largely took place during the 1980s and 1990s. There is an overwhelming amount of scientific evidence on the positive effects of sport and physical activity as part of a healthy lifestyle. The positive, direct effects of engaging in regular physical activity are particularly apparent in the prevention of several chronic diseases, including: cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, hypertension, obesity, depression and osteoporosis.*

**Sport, physical activity and risk factors**

**for major diseases.**

*An understanding of the most prevalent diseases and associated risk factors is crucial to conceptualise the role of sport in health prevention and promotion. In developing countries, sport is widely used as a tool to educate individuals and communities on the risk factors associated with HIV/AIDS. Whilst HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases continue to affect millions of people around the world, there is a significant increase in the global burden of non-communicable diseases related to lifestyle changes in physical inactivity, unhealthy diets and tobacco use.*

* **Diabetes:** *Diabetes is a disease which occurs when the body does not produce or properly use insulin and this may result in Type I or Type II diabetes. Diabetes may be prevented, or at least delayed, by weight loss, a healthy lifestyle, in particular,****regular physical activity****. Diet, drug therapy and physical activity are also major components of the treatment of diabetes.*

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* **Obesity:**

*Obesity is an abnormal accumulation of fat that may impair health and unlike other diseases, social and environmental factors play a significant role in defining obesity.****The incidence of obesity is a growing concern internationally****with an estimated 400 million obese people in 2005.  The global rise in the incidence of obesity is related to a shift in diet and decreased physical activity levels.*

* Cancer:

*Cancer is not a single disease with a single type of treatment and in fact, there are over 200 types of cancer involving abnormal growth of cells in different parts of the body. It has been estimated that****40% of all cancers may be prevented****by a healthy diet, physical activity and no tobacco use.*

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* **Mental health:**

*One in four patients visiting a health service has at least one mental, neurological or behavioural disorder (such as depression, anxiety or mood disorders) that may not be diagnosed or treated. There is evidence to suggest that****physical activity can reduce the symptoms of depression****and can also be help to ameliorate mental well-being through improved mood and self-perception.*