University of the People  
PSYC 1111 – Introduction to Health Psychology  
Unit 1 Written Assignment

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# The Role of Health Psychology in Promoting Health and Preventing Disease

Health psychology is a subfield of psychology that focuses on how behavioral, cognitive, and emotional factors influence physical health and illness. It seeks to understand how individuals stay healthy, why they become ill, and how they respond when they do become ill. Through this lens, health psychologists aim to improve health promotion strategies, design effective interventions, and reduce health disparities by examining the interplay between biological, psychological, and social factors.

One of the primary roles of health psychology is to promote healthier lifestyles and behaviors such as physical activity, balanced diets, smoking cessation, and stress management. These behaviors can significantly reduce the risk of chronic diseases like cardiovascular conditions, diabetes, and cancer. In addition, health psychologists contribute to disease prevention by identifying psychological barriers to health care, supporting adherence to medical treatments, and developing public health campaigns to educate and motivate individuals to make better health choices (Ogden, 2019).

## Comparing the Biopsychosocial and Biomedical Models

Traditionally, the biomedical model has dominated the medical field, viewing illness purely as a result of physiological dysfunction. This model focuses on diagnosing and treating the physical causes of disease, often excluding psychological and social contributors. While this approach is effective for acute, infectious conditions, it falls short when applied to chronic or multifactorial diseases that are influenced by behavior and context.

In contrast, the biopsychosocial model offers a more comprehensive understanding by incorporating the biological, psychological, and social dimensions of health. Developed by George Engel in 1977, this model recognizes that mental and emotional factors (e.g., stress, coping strategies) and environmental influences (e.g., socioeconomic status, cultural beliefs) are just as critical as biological processes in understanding health outcomes (Taukeni, 2021). This integrative approach allows for a more nuanced view of illness, enabling better prevention, diagnosis, and treatment strategies.

## Application: Type 2 Diabetes as a Biopsychosocial Condition

To illustrate this, consider type 2 diabetes—a chronic illness characterized by the body’s inability to regulate blood glucose levels. Biologically, type 2 diabetes results from insulin resistance and impaired pancreatic function. However, these physiological changes are often influenced by behavioral patterns such as sedentary lifestyles, high-calorie diets, and obesity. Genetic predisposition also plays a role, increasing susceptibility in certain individuals.

From a psychological perspective, stress, depression, and low self-efficacy can undermine an individual’s ability to manage their condition. Patients may struggle with motivation to adhere to lifestyle changes or feel overwhelmed by the complexity of managing their blood sugar, diet, and medication routines. Psychological support is therefore essential in helping patients cope with the emotional burden of the illness and maintain treatment adherence.

Socially, access to healthy food, availability of exercise facilities, and the quality of health care can significantly influence both the onset and management of diabetes. Individuals from low-income backgrounds or underserved communities may experience barriers to preventive care and treatment, exacerbating the disease’s progression. Social support networks, including family and community, also impact how well individuals can manage their condition.

By understanding type 2 diabetes through the biopsychosocial model, interventions can be designed to address not just the biological symptoms but also the emotional and social challenges that patients face. Health psychologists can work collaboratively with medical professionals to offer counseling, design behavioral modification programs, and advocate for health equity in diabetes care.

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## References

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