FIT – FOR ANYTHING

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To be 'fit' is a fine sounding achievement but meaningless without qualification. Fit – yes, but fit for what?

There are few activities in life which do not demand some skill and some degree of health. Health and fitness are usually regarded as synonymous but in fact the latter belongs more to the physical side of life and frequently to the field of sport. When applied to 'occupation' involving work in a hazardous environment 'fitness' must include both the physical and psychological ability to withstand whatever stresses and strains the activity may impose.

Unfortunately there is a tendency for every occupation, every sport and every adventurous mission to have its own specific code of practice including safety precautions and standards of 'fitness'. There has developed a multiplicity of expertise protecting man from the hazards of an ever-increasing number of activities in the fields of sport, work, travel, adventure and even the home. This multiplicity of specialisation has been one of the tragedies of medicine. It has taken interest away from the individual as an entity and focused it on the environment on the one hand and on particular disease processes on the other. Interest in the former has been in the prevention of disease or injury and, in the latter, treatment and cure. The maintenance and improvement of health has been neglected.

A more logical and rewarding approach is needed to redirect a large proportion of medical and allied caring to the whole human being and positively support the concept of *total health* which can be defined as:

The ability of an individual to mobilize his resources physically, mentally and spiritually to the preservation and advantage of himself, his dependants and the society to which he belongs.

Man plays a double role. First as a very self-contained and private individual with likes, dislikes, assets and failings. He has an inbuilt desire to survive and bring up a family. He has instinctive urges for relatively violent activity to maintain an on-going efficiency. This is supported by an insatiable curiosity and emotional drive. Secondly, he plays a part as a biological unit in the natural environment with an active responsibility to his contemporaries in the increasingly complicated 'man made' environment of advancing technology.

Health, happiness and indeed survival demand that these two roles come to terms. In other words the individual must be FIT to accept his responsibility as an active member of his own environment.

"Fitness" or better still "Health" is thus the on-going relationship between the versatile and restless human being and his ever changing environment. It must follow that in assessing "Fitness" for any task or indeed measuring health "Time" must be accounted for. A single physical check gives only a static picture of the potential at the time of examination and is of doubtful value as a "Fitness" test for an event some time ahead. On-going monitoring is needed which takes full account of behaviour at all times. Success in a demanding occupation or involvement in competitive sport will depend not only on acquired skills but on the total health, the quality of life and what is being done at all times between the spells of active participation.

A working man may spend as little as 10% of his whole life actually at work. The other 90% is of paramount importance to his well being. The top athlete or sportsman may spend even less in actual competition and the unemployed person none at all. The range between the working man, the sportsman and the unemployed is not great. All need interest and activity to ensure an acceptable quality of life in which work itself could well be replaced by alternative pre-occupation.

THE QUALITY OF LIFE

This elusive feature is most certainly related to 'health' as already defined. It expresses the advantages to self, dependents and society achieved by successful mobilization of available resources. These advantages may be summarised in seven guide lines thus:

*Facility for friendly cooperation with others,
Status, wealth and achievement,
Personal possessions,
Skills and knowledge,
Motivation, morale and dedication to service (work),
Attitudes to rest and recreation, and
Faith and philosophy.*

SURVIVAL

To achieve and maintain these qualities demands an

ability to avoid serious illness or injury and reach with dignity and relaxation the years of natural ageing. Injury and illness have much in common and their prevention can be accomplished by an understanding control of environment.

The individual on the other hand must learn and be helped to maintain a high standard of health by education, practice and professional support. This involves periodic assessment with on-going personal monitoring. Though designed to maintain and improve health there is also a built in screening process to identify early signs of disease processes.

The pattern for survival is thus:

CHANCE

However successful the personal and environmental efforts, there must always remain the 'chance' factor — a random coincidence of time and place on the bridge-head between man and his environment.

Random contacts at all levels, physical and biological, determine the continuing interplay of matter and energy from the microscopic to the macrocosmic. More personal encounters provide opportunities to enjoy and exploit unexpected circumstances.

The essential impact of chance on evolutionary progress has, to a large extent, rubbed off on the mind of man who tends to see only the benefits of a gamble. Many hours of recreation are filled with games of chance; work and sport lean heavily upon it and its statistical interpretation is often the best guide to probabilities of success or failure.

PERSONAL FACTORS

(i) *Health* is dependent upon a sound genetic background, early parental care, adequate environmental life support and continuing exercise of all faculties, sensory, motor, mental and spiritual. Such is living tissue that inactivity leads to atrophy. All must therefore be maintained in a state of readiness to meet anticipated and casual demands. From such a state of readiness any one system can be developed by continuous exercise to a peak of performance and efficiency. Such activity is accompanied invariably by a parallel upgrading of all other systems.

(ii) *Accident (or illness) proneness*. The human body has a wealth of reserve of effort both physical and

mental. When a crisis is met, danger threatens, or circumstances make exceptional demands, these reserves are mobilized. On the physical side adrenaline is released, heart and breathing rate increase, muscle tone improves and the sensory system is alerted. Mental concentration is directed to the task ahead.

However, in the rough and tumble of present day life, personal problems and chronic stress, domestic and occupational, may cause a steady drain on the reserves so that when the crisis occurs there is little left to cope. Panic may well ensue, accidents may happen or the ever present threat of disease may take advantage of a lowered resistance. Such is accident proneness, an increased vulnerability to injury or lowered resistance to disease. It is found in the children of unsettled, unhappy and ill-adjusted parents. It occurs in the man or woman unable to face the every day problems and hustle, or make ends meet financially. It is frequent in the relatively young, busy executive or manager who, lacking in maturity, is reluctant to delegate, uncertain of his future, constantly travelling, at odds with his wife and leaning towards alcohol. It is found also in the sportsman who neglects his training when success goes to his head and the opportunity for pleasure and profit wins the day.

(iii) *Risk acceptance*. A natural urge in man is to achieve maximum success with minimum effort. A force of inbuilt optimism which allows him to take risks for sheer enjoyment, for personal prestige or for financial gain, that is, for fun, fame or fortune. In extreme cases of hardship and deprivation risks are taken simply to survive.

Hazardous occupations are accepted for greater pay. Competitive sports are undertaken for the glamour of championship. Dangerous, adventurous and challenging missions have the reward in the excitement of overcoming danger.

There is an almost direct relationship between risk taking and injury or illness in what is largely a personal choice. Codes of practice and rules of sport may influence this choice as may opportunities for insurance.

(iv) *Physical factors*. In day to day living there are many factors which influence health and increase greatly vulnerability to accident with injury or illness. They are well recognised but inadequately considered. They include the use of alcohol, drugs and medicaments and their immediate and lingering after-effects. Hunger, fatigue, anger and frustration may impair skill and judgement. In the search for good, sound health these pitfalls must be avoided.

(v) *Training*. Any one who has achieved and maintains good health, whose quality of life is pleasing can

theoretically be trained for any activity i.e. be 'fit for anything' if training is available. The achievement of man or woman in all professions, pastimes and sports amply proves what can be gained with dedication and effort but only with a complete understanding and acceptance of the challenge and the help of dedicated and skilled trainers. Starting with a favourable background of health, success is related to the degree of training, exposure and encouragement.

(vi) *Maturity.* Even in a healthy person training alone, however good, cannot achieve ultimate success without that final ingredient 'maturity' (sportsmen call it 'heart'). Having little to do with age it reflects ability in adapting to circumstances, to maintaining enthusiasm, to responding to encouragement, and never allowing boredom and monotony to intervene. It is an expression of morale and motivation closely associated with the spiritual aspects of health.

(vii) *Safety measures.* Experience in all activities uncovers the built in hazards. From the safety measures, codes of practice and rules for competitive sports, evolve guide lines aimed to safeguard inexperienced individuals without prejudice to enjoyment, success or productivity. For this critical balance is needed and it is all too easy to use such measures as an alternative to training and skill or allow them in the interests of apparent welfare to impede imaginative achievement.

THE ENVIRONMENT (Land, sea, air and space)

Finally, with chance and the personal factors under control man is ready to come to terms with the environment of which he too is an integral part.

It is indeed in the age of technical miracles limitless and only the briefest outline can be given in this short presentation. The two main dimensions are natural and man made:

Natural. This includes terrain, climate, altitude, animal life, man, the surface and depths of the seas and inland waters, the atmosphere and the limitless space beyond.

Man made. The major areas for man are his home as a shelter, his workplace, his playground and his means of travel. His clothing, instruments and equipment he uses in association with his fellow men are designed to maintain his endeavours and extend his activities beyond his immediate surroundings by provision of artificial life support systems in all directions.

The evolution of man is slow compared with his technology so the latter must ever be planned with consideration for his limitations lest he be swamped with the product of his own imagination and desire. The playgrounds and arenas for sport and culture provide the proving ground and preparation for survival and service. As technology takes over the menial tasks of industry an increasing number of men and women will find themselves without opportunity to be involved in productive commercial enterprise. They may still enjoy a rewarding quality of life in health and interest free from worry.

In other words, fitness for anything must include fitness for 'unemployment'.

Fitness for anything demands a high standard of health to achieve which is a personal aim. Thus medicine should direct a good share of its interests away from intervention with the sick and injured to the promotion, maintenance and improvement of health. For this the need is to concentrate on man himself and not on the large number of ever changing environments with which he must come to terms — at work, at play, at home or when travelling. That is for the trainers, the educators, the scientists and the philosophers.