Policies to improve health

In 1984 the World Health Organization advocated legislation, fiscal measures, organizational change, community development and spontaneous local activities against health hazards as methods of health promotion. One of the major targets of their health promotion programme was ‘Equity in Health’, meaning that everyone should have an equal opportunity to reach their full health potential. It does not mean eliminating all health differences but rather reducing those deemed avoidable or unfair. Health promotion is often focused on changing behavioral risk factors and appears as ‘health education’ and ‘social marketing.’ Social marketing is the systematic application of marketing to achieve particular behavioral objectives for social good. It is used to promote ‘merit goods’ and discourage the consumption of ‘demerit goods’. Examples of social marketing include campaigns to promote the wearing of seatbelts and to discourage smoking and to inform people of the relationship between sunbathing and skin cancer. The promotion of a healthy lifestyle has also become a major media issue that goes far beyond guidelines concerning diet, fitness and awareness of health issues. Nowadays it promotes a culture of youthfulness, beauty and wellbeing via a multitude of treatments, procedures, pills, supplements, diets, exercise regimes, exercise equipment and alternative medicine plus an inordinate amount of health and fitness associated products. This type of promotion is commercial marketing aimed at those who are able and willing to pay for the goods and services. Healthy living and a healthy lifestyle however does not need to be expensive. Education and the promotion of the fundamentals of good health should be a global initiative undertaken by all governments along with specific strategies to provide poorer communities with the basic requirements to enable them to adopt healthier lifestyles.