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The King’s Fund, a health policy making unit based in London prides itself on its innovative ideas, and has come up with the idea of *Putting health first!* Their paper suggests the ‘… environment appears to be more favorable to turning the horse and cart around than at any time in the last 50 years’.

What is their radical proposal? Simply, that instead of being registered with a GP surgery, NHS money might be better spent enrolling us all in health clubs. That is only part of their plan. We need, they say, a new health ‘system’. Not the rigidly defined NHS but a local health organization composed of all sorts of health providers in the community, with neighborhood-based health centers.

They refer to the current model of health referral as ‘a tendency in general practice to see each transaction as a needy patient presenting a problem that can be solved by a professional’. It is stated that it is this attitude which needs to change, and that health clubs safeguarding and promoting health all through life might fit the bill. Health clubs could provide information and advice, as well as providing the physical setting to enhance health. Only when ill-health presents itself would people be referred to something like the current NHS model.

One thing is clear, we do need to put health promotion further up our list of priorities: A journal headline screams ‘Scottish men’s life expectancy “shocking”’. The accompanying article says that in some areas of Scotland life expectancy for men is down to 63 years – 12 years lower than the UK average; In London about 1 in 4 male and 1 in 8 female deaths are attributed to smoking, with an annual death toll of 10,500; around 9,000 new cases of cancer per year are related to being overweight, and so on with ever more disturbing statistics.

Gym might be able to fix some of these problems, but certainly not all of them. The Public Health minister, Melanie Johnson, has responded to the various health issues by stating that children and young people are the key to a healthier nation. Although she did not state it, research from Scandinavia shows that health attitudes are pretty well set by age 11, so Johnson is right.

I feel a little *déjà vu* coming on! A GC Health Ministries meeting in 1977 anticipated the radical new concepts in health promotion by proposing the establishment of Better Living Centers, ‘To promote an optimum lifestyle by education, demonstration, and practice, to improve physical mental, social and spiritual health for persons with recognized or potential health problems’. It is not so much a King’s Fund idea, rather it is the King’s business!

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