Healthy Living: The Universal and Timeless Medicine for Healthspan
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The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *medicine* several ways, including: “1) a - substance or preparation used in treating disease, b - something that affects well-being; and 2) a - the science and art dealing with the maintenance of health and the prevention, alleviation, or cure of disease, b - the branch of medicine concerned with the nonsurgical treatment of disease.”\(^1\)

Relevant to this editorial and this edition of *Progress in Cardiovascular Diseases*, salient touchstones from the definition of *medicine* include *treating disease*, *affecting well-being*, *maintenance of health*, *prevention and alleviation of disease*, and *non-surgical*. At this juncture, a primary threat to the health and wellbeing of the global population is the incidence and prevalence of chronic diseases as well as future projections, including cardiovascular, pulmonary and metabolic diseases, as well as several forms of cancer are leading concerns.\(^2\)-\(^4\) To address the chronic disease burden successfully, there is a need to reformulate our approach to *medicine*, including what constitutes *medicine*, optimal therapeutic dosages and by whom and where it is administered.\(^5\)

The rise in chronic disease incidence and prevalence is paralleled by an unrelenting rise in an *unhealthy living* phenotype; central to his phenotype are physical inactivity, poor diet, and, now, to a lesser extent in some countries but continuing to be a significant concern, tobacco use.\(^6\) Excess body weight is intricately related to physical inactivity and poor diet and is thus also a common characteristic of the *unhealthy living* phenotype. In fact, a recent position statement by the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists and the American College of Endocrinology has proposed new terminology, “adiposity-based chronic disease”, bringing new attention to the detrimental impact to excess body mass to one’s health.\(^7\) There is broad recognition that a lifelong adoption of the *healthy living* phenotype (i.e., primordial prevention) or reversal of the *unhealthy living* phenotype (i.e., primary and secondary prevention), even if the
reversal is only partial, portends profound health (i.e., decreased morbidity and mortality as well as improved function and quality of life) and economic (i.e., decreased utilization of the most costly aspects of health care – hospitalizations, surgical procedures, and prescription medications) benefits.\textsuperscript{8-11} Compared to individuals who emulate the poorest lifestyle characteristics, it has been found that those with an ideal healthy living phenotype demonstrate a $\geq 45\%$ reduction in chronic disease risk.\textsuperscript{9,12,13} Even in individuals genetically predisposed to chronic disease, the ideal healthy living phenotype remains highly protective.\textsuperscript{13} Truly there is no other drug or surgical procedure that can boast such risk reductions. It is again important to stress that risk reduction is on a continual scale, with any movement away from the unhealthy living phenotype toward facets of a healthy living phenotype portending significant health benefits. Suffice to say, taking 20 minute walks twice per week is preferable to no leisure time physical activity (PA) as is having 2 servings of fruits and vegetables per day compared to no daily servings.\textsuperscript{8,14} This pragmatic approach should replace the traditional dichotomous, guidelines-based approach (i.e., all or nothing) and is well-suited to optimize the uptake of characteristics of the healthy living phenotype in a larger proportion of the global population, particularly those currently emulating the poorest unhealthy living phenotype. From a population perspective, minimal movements towards the healthy living phenotype are projected to have significant benefits.\textsuperscript{15} While we should always strive for an ideal healthy living phenotype in all individuals, recognizing the importance of medicinal pragmatism (i.e., a two-way health-related dialogue with the intent of finding practical solutions to a problem and ultimately a common truth) will undoubtedly increase the likelihood of adherence to a healthier lifestyle.
The clear line between *health living* and the profound reduction in the risk for chronic disease is irrefutable. In fact, the best approach to addressing the chronic disease crisis is to promote the adoption of the *healthy living* phenotype. In revisiting the definition of medicine (i.e., treating disease, affecting well-being, maintenance of health, prevention and alleviation of disease, and non-surgical), a clear case is made for the concept of *healthy living medicine* (HLM). The concept of *exercise as medicine* has already been established and promoted for several years. However, this is a fragmented approach that does not capture the full potential and importance of HLM. The overarching goal of HLM is to optimally prolong the *healthspan*, which can be defined as the number of years an individual is healthy and free from debilitating disease. Being physically active, consuming nutritious and healthy food, not smoking and maintaining an appropriate body weight are all essential to the *healthspan*. This is in sharp contrast to the concept of the lifespan, which exclusively speaks to the number of years an individual is alive without necessarily considering functional independence and quality of life. From an economics standpoint, a health system that focusses on promoting the *healthspan* as opposed to the *lifespan* is far more favorable.

The framework for the essential elements of HLM is well-captured by Life’s Simple 7 (LS7) put forth by the American Heart Association, consisting of 4 health behaviors (PA, diet, tobacco use, and body weight) and 3 health factors (cholesterol, blood pressure, blood sugar). Moreover, practicing ideal LS7 health behaviors synergizes with more favorable health factors. There is abundant evidence linking a more favorable LS7 score, on a continual scale, and improved health outcome. As such, LS7 serves as both a vital sign and *healthy living* polypill. All individuals should be prescribed this polypill, the ingredients of which are the
foundation of HLM. As mentioned previously, to optimize adherence to HLM, a pragmatic approach to up-titration as well as variable dosages and ingredients that constitute the healthy living polypill should be considered. Such an approach aligns with the concept of precision medicine\textsuperscript{27}; the healthy living polypill can and should consider personal characteristics and likelihood for adherence. Unlike traditional pharmacology, the healthy living polypill can be constituted with variable ingredients and dosages while maintaining significant therapeutic efficacy and virtually no side effect profile. For example, a common approach to providing PA recommendations focus on the ideal exercise phenotype with little forethought into the PA level from which an individual is beginning their journey toward a healthy living phenotype. For an individual who leads a sedentary lifestyle, considering the instantaneous adoption of an exercise program consisting of 150 minutes or more of moderate intensity exercise per week\textsuperscript{28} may seem unattainable. Moreover, the literature clearly indicates that movement away from a sedentary lifestyle toward any level of increased PA portends significant health benefits.\textsuperscript{24} Thus, with respect to the healthy living polypill and HLM moving forward, we should consider a medicinal pragmatism approach; finding a common truth, which in this case being any mutually agreed upon adoption of the healthy living phenotype, an achievement that should always be celebrated. Moreover, as the pragmatic two-way communication continues, the health care provider and individual receiving care should continually strive for increased adoption of the healthy living phenotype. Literature examining the relationship between the incremental improvement in LS7 scores and improved health outcome aligns with this premise.\textsuperscript{25}

In conclusion, to best address the current chronic disease burden and future projections, there is broad recognition and acceptance for the need to reinvent how healthcare is delivered. There must be a shift away from reactionary care, waiting for a diagnosis of one or more chronic
diseases to be highly likely, due to entrenchment of an *unhealthy living* phenotype, or to in fact be diagnosed before care is initiated. Preventing chronic disease and, ideally, associated risk factors (e.g., excess body mass, elevated blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar) from ever occurring is of paramount importance. To ideally deliver HLM, what constitutes a “health care” setting must change; parks, schools, and the workplace, for example, should all be considered clinical settings ideal for the delivery of HLM in the context of primordial and primary prevention. The traditional healthcare settings (i.e., hospitals and outpatient clinics) must also embrace the delivery of HLM to all patients receiving care. Essentially, every individual on the planet is eligible for HLM and should receive an individualized *healthy living* polypill prescription. The stakeholders invested in and required for the successful delivery and uptake of HLM and the *healthy living* polypill must also be expanded. For example, a 4th grade educator should be invested in HLM, dispensing the *healthy living* polypill to his/her students. Significant consideration must be put into how traditional healthcare professionals (e.g., physicians, nurses, pharmacists, dentists and other allied health professionals) are uniformly trained to deliver HLM and dispense the *healthy living* polypill. The ability to effectively harmonize communication between the health care provider and individual receiving care as well as leverage technology are also key considerations. Lastly, there is a need for a strategic HLM research agenda, focused on continually improving the way HLM is delivered. This edition of *Progress in Cardiovascular Diseases* will provide a blueprint for the new Healthy Living Healthcare System and address key considerations needed to ensure this new system is optimally effective.
References


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