

Take home messages from the Dedicated Issue: Doping and dietary supplements in sport as an emerging hazard for public health

*Postfazione al fascicolo 6/2019 dedicato a:
Il doping e gli integratori alimentari nelle attività sportive stanno
emergendo come problema di Sanità Pubblica*

V. Romano Spica^{1,2,§}

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Nowadays, doping represents a wrong habit and a social disease more than just a violation of sport rules during a specific competition (1-3). The misuse of drugs and dietary supplements overcomes the impact on the restricted élite of top athletes and appears as a wider phenomenon, spreading through the general population of different ages, in European countries and worldwide (4-7). In this broader meaning, doping represents not only an individual risk for health, but also an illness within the globalized modern societies and an emerging issue for public health. The WHO objectives toward promoting physical activity as a priority for population health, further emphasize the need for safe environments for sport, from gym to urban areas (8-11).

Starting from the ten statements of the Erice 2018 Charter the present contributions to the 6/2019 issue of *Annali di Igiene*

propose a proactive approach, founded on education and realized through the structures of the National Health Service (NHS) (12).

In this perspective, the question of doping prevention in the general population becomes an extraordinary opportunity to: i) develop new models for health education in a very receptive target population, involving sport and physical activity in different age groups and in different ability conditions (13); ii) benefit from the sport context as an effective vehicle to consider other risk factors, such as diet, drugs, lifestyles, favoring a personalized and holistic approach and proposing alternative solutions and peer educational tools (14); iii) share specialized medical issues or advanced scientific achievements in a very welcoming and listening setting, spreading evidence-based knowledge to the target populations (15, 16). In conclusion, doping issues and sport environments

¹ Department of Movement, Human and Health Sciences, University of Rome "Foro Italico", Rome, Italy

² Guest Editor of the Issue 6/2019, *Annali di Igiene*

§ e-mail: vincenzo.romanospica@uniroma4.it

represent an advanced and fertile area to vehicle additional preventive actions and promote awareness and empowerment on healthy lifestyles. In the medium-term, this approach can join two promising strategies for prevention of chronic diseases by: a) providing an innovative opportunity and framework for health education; b) promoting physical activity through policies with an excellent cost-effectiveness ratio. Regardless of the different priority needs to combat doping in athletes and ensure the fairness of competitions e.g. by anti-doping test, the matter of this dedicated issue concerns a much larger part of the population, inside and outside the sport world. The misuse of drugs or dietary supplements is an expression of a wrong approach towards lifestyles and towards commercially available medical - or health related - products.

The final take-home message from this 6/2019 issue is that doping prevention is an emerging question of public health and a valuable opportunity of health promotion for the NHS. It requires a centralized multidisciplinary approach driven by qualified operators and local facilities of the DPs (17). In particular, the DPs and the different NHS local services are invited to take action to design, lead and manage specific interventions, based on the general indications of the Regional Referents Network and the Permanent Tool realized by the Working Group of the Doping Prevention Project, promoted by the Ministry of Health (1). Within this renewed role of anti-doping and sport in prevention and health promotion through the DPs, Health Districts and local services of the Italian NHS, the graduates in sport and movement sciences represent a fundamental and highly desirable resource, in addition to all the already available professional skills (18). Their active collaboration is needed both in doping prevention as well as in health promotion through adapted physical activity within the DPs and the NHS.

Even if remarkable results were obtained, after forty years since the Italian NHS was established, several issues remain to be improved in order to assure those founding principles of universality, equality and equity (19). After four decades, a checkup of the Italian NHS is due and welcome, to match the signs of the times with a constructive refreshing. Sport and physical activity may represent a priority key-strategy to trigger a flywheel to strengthen the ingrained roots of the NHS tree and support its novel sprouts by focusing on prevention of multifactorial diseases and therefore investing on the medium-term future (9, 10). In this perspective, “education” is the keyword (1,3,8,13). Reading the contributes of this special issue, shows how the prevention of doping can be a candidate model to carry education to health, education to legality, education to appropriate management of NHS, and - most of all - education to its appreciation and proper use. The NHS scenario can still represent the winning solution among different health systems, integrating government and institutions, private companies and business, general population and super-empowered individuals, challenging a health vision as a personal right and a socially shared target (20). The awareness of its limits, but also of its rules and of its modern principles and vision, supports -40 years after its birth- its great potential for achieving a winning public health, based on trained operators and on educated citizens as well.

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Additional documents and the Italian version is available at: www.sitinazionale.it/BDS/muoversi and/or at link www.progettodoping.it

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Corresponding author: Prof. Vincenzo Romano Spica, MD, Public Health - Epidemiology and Biotechnology Laboratory, Department of Movement, Human and Health Sciences, University of Rome "Foro Italico", Piazza Lauro De Bosis 6, 00135 Rome, Italy
e-mail: vincenzo.romanospica@uniroma4.it