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UN to address the Physical Activity on Prescription concept

[PRESS RELEASE 2011-09-19] **A Swedish delegation including researchers from Karolinska Institutet is to visit the UN headquarters this week to promote the use of physical activity to combat chronic diseases.**



Carl Johan Sundberg Photo: Camilla Svensk

When the UN General Assembly convenes this autumn, the theme of debate will be chronic disease. In many parts of the world, changes in lifestyle are taking place that are making chronic diseases such as diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular disease much more prevalent in society.

"The UN hasn't addressed chronic diseases at this level before because they've been considered a 'luxury problem' in the West," says Carl Johan Sundberg, associate professor in physiology at Karolinska Institutet and chairperson of Professional Associations for Physical Activity, an association under the Swedish Society of Medicine. "But now they pose new challenges for many countries where



poverty is on the decline. These countries already have serious problems with infection diseases such as malaria and HIV, and now they're having to tackle chronic diseases too."

Dr Sundberg is part of a Swedish delegation led by Karin Johansson, under-secretary of state at the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, to the UN headquarters in New York this week. Here, he will share Swedish experiences of preventing and treating disease with the Physical Activity on Prescription concept. The method, which was devised in Sweden ten years ago, has been frequently applied by the healthcare services and given positive evaluations. Dr Sundberg is now running a Sida-sponsored project in Vietnam to import the method there, with the aim of training 120 local doctors in the method and helping them spread it further throughout the country. The method is based on Physical Activity in the Prevention and Treatment of Disease, a book compiled by 95 doctors, many of whom are active at Karolinska Institutet, summarising the latest scientific knowledge in the field.

Physical inactivity is linked to most of our common health problems, such as diabetes, myocardial infarction, breast cancer, colon cancer and osteoporosis.

FYSS has recently been translated into English, and Dr Sundberg hopes that the concept of prescribing physical activity will come into worldwide use.

"But it will have to be adapted quite a bit to suit different contexts. In Sweden we can recommend sports clubs, gyms or swimming pools, and people can take long walks in safety here. This isn't possible everywhere. But people can be physically active wherever they are in the world."

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