Health messages on everybody’s mail

The idea of carrying messages on postage stamps is by no means new. It is said that, in 1942, Franklin Roosevelt, President of the USA, advocated the future use of postage stamps to disseminate the ideals of the yet unborn United Nations Organization.

Health messages have long been carried on stamps, cancellations and special envelopes. The Philatelic Museum of the United Nations Postal Administration in Geneva has an impressive collection of stamps related to the World Health Organization and health messages. As the accompanying illustrations show, these messages can take many forms.

Some postal administrations are particularly active in using stamps as a medium for messages. Others seem to be quite inactive. Perhaps some health ministries, and other interested parties, have not fully understood the enormous potential for health education which exists here.

Practically everybody receives mail from time to time. Most people examine the franking on their letters and many take a close look at the stamps. Millions of philatelists discuss any messages that appear on them and make special collections, and many request further information from the offices of the United Nations Postal Administration in Geneva, New York and Vienna. Newspapers and magazines all over the world describe stamps and explain the backgrounds to their themes and messages.

Stamps and frankings can, in my opinion, be a major inexpensive source of information about health and other subjects. If those interested in promoting health were to use the full potential of stamps for this purpose, we would probably be a step closer to achieving health for all.

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1. **Madagascar**, 1977, World Health Day — “Immunize and protect your child”.
2. **Switzerland**, 1958 — WHO’s 10th anniversary.
3. **Afghanistan**, 1972, World Health Day — “Your heart is your health”.
5. **Pakistan**, 1977 — World Rheumatism Year.
8. **Switzerland**, 1948 — First stamp used by WHO.
18. **France**, 1980, World Health Day — “Smoking or health: the choice is yours”.