



A case of mind and matter

HEALTH is not simply the absence of disease.

That is the message from a leading medical professor and member of the World Health Organisation in the lead-up to National Health and Fitness Week next week.

Professor Travis Threats of St Louis University in the US was in Australia this week to speak at Speech Pathology Australia's national conference in Adelaide.

As part of his work on the World Health Organisation's International Classification of Functioning Disability and Health, Professor Threats has helped extend the concept of what it is to be healthy.

Ideas of what constitutes health have traditionally been centred on physical diseases and ailments such as broken bones, heart conditions and cancers.

But in recent decades leading medical professionals have tried to encourage an understanding of how other conditions, including mental illnesses, can have a negative effect on a person's health.

The World Health Organisation classifications recognise that there are many interacting factors that determine how well people with a disability function within a society, including how helpful their environments are.

"Two people could have a stroke that affects the same regions of the brain, but function very differently. One could still maintain their large circle of friends, while the other person could become isolated," said Professor Threats.

"The ability to express ourselves is something most of us take for granted. But what if you could not easily



discuss your feelings, thoughts or needs?

"This is the situation for millions of people in Australia who have some level of communication disorder."

Professor Threats's address in Adelaide outlined the challenges this expanded view of disability presented for the field of speech pathology.

THE WHOLE STORY: Medical professionals are extending the concept of what it is to be healthy.