

DEFINING WELLNESS

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The term wellness is not new in society, although it is considered a relatively new framework as it relates to mental health recovery. Wellness is now being viewed as an important construct as it relates to personal recovery and mental health systems transformation. We use the term wellness quite broadly and often tend to focus on the physical dimension. Programs and state authorities are viewing wellness narrowly on the physical health. While physical health is important, it is critical to understand the wellness framework as a bigger concept, so that services and programs can be organized, and outcomes measured, more effectively.

The following will provide a brief history of the term wellness followed by a *wellness framework*. We hope you will consider this framework as a guideline, whether you are managing your life, seeking and using services, delivering services, or helping to manage and oversee a wellness-oriented service system.

Background

Wellness is an inspiring and powerful word in the English language. However it is one of the least understood, and therefore most open to interpretation and personal definition. Wellness is not a popular or exotic fad, but rather a philosophy of living that can help people live a more satisfying, productive, and happy life. Wellness offers a person a philosophy that supports healthy lifestyle habits that have positive effects on quality of life.

Aristotle surmised “the development of personal strengths (potentials) in the context of a balanced life may be the key to well being.” Hippocrates wrote “a wise persons should consider that health is the greatest human blessings and learn to, by his/her own thought derive benefit from his/her illness.”

For centuries, philosophies of good living and health and well being have evolved within societies. Since early times, the ancient Greek people went to temples to remove themselves from stress and pulls of life. They focused on diet relaxation, self-examination that was believed to help restore energy and vitality as well as a sense of wholeness, harmony, and balance. There was a holistic view of individuals. Music, arts, exercise, healthy nutrition, play, and imagery were seen to promote healing and health.

Words of Wellness

Things such as art, philosophy, humor and spirituality were seen as lifestyle practices to replace

- Stress with harmony
- Anger with peace
- Despair with hope
- Isolation with community.

In 1961, Halbert Dunn started lecturing and writing articles about an idea he called “high level wellness.” Dr. Dunn stressed the importance of mind/body/spirit connections, the need for satisfactions and valued purposes, and a view of health as dramatically more than non-illness. He coined the term “high level wellness” and defined it as “an integrated method of functioning of which the individual is capable within the environment.” In this definition, there is no optimal level of wellness, but rather recognition that wellness is a direction in the progress toward an ever-higher potential of functioning (Dunn, 1961^[3]). Wellness is not the absence of disease, illness, and stress but the presence of:

- purpose in life,
- active involvement in satisfying work and play,
- joyful relationships,
- A healthy body and living environment, and
- presence of happiness

During the 1960’s, 1970’s and 1980’s a variety of theoretical frameworks for wellness emerged. Dr Travis^[4] published the Wellness Workbook and Dr Hettler^[5] proposed a six dimensional wellness model.

Wellness Defined

Wellness approaches for mental health practice have been proposed in recent years (Copeland, 2002^[6]; Hutchinson, 1996^[7]; Swarbrick, 1997^[8]; Weed, 1999^[9]).

Wellness is a conscious, deliberate process that requires a person to become aware of and make choices for a more satisfying lifestyle. A wellness lifestyle includes a self defined balance of

^[3] Dunn, H.L. (1961). High-Level Wellness. Arlington, VA: Beatty Press; Dunn, H.L. (1977). What High Level Wellness Means. *Health Values*, 1(1), 9-16.

^[4] *The Wellness Workbook*, coauthored with Regina Ryan (Ten Speed Press, 1981, 1988, Celestial Arts, 2004)

^[5] Dr Bill Hettler 6 dimensions of wellness <http://www.hettler.com/OriginsoftheHettler6DimensionalModel.mht>

^[6] Copeland, M. E. (2002). *Wellness Recovery Action Plan*. West Dummerston, VT: Peach Press.

^[7]

Hutchinson, D.S., (1996) “Promoting Wellness in Rehabilitation and Recovery - A Call to Action”. *Community Support Network News*, Vol. 11, No. 2.

^[8] Swarbrick, M. (1997, March). A wellness model for clients. *Mental Health Special Interest Section Quarterly*, 20, 1-4.

^[9]

Weed, D. (1999). *Health Lifestyle Workbook for Consumers of Mental health Services*. Fall River Health and Human Services Coalition, Inc., Massachusetts Health Research Institute.

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health habits such as adequate sleep and rest, productivity, exercise, participation in meaningful activity, nutrition, productivity, social contact, and supportive relationships^[10]. It is important to note self defined because everyone has individual needs and preferences, and the balance of activity, social contact, and sleep varies from person to person. Wellness is the process of creating and adapting patterns of behavior that lead to improved health in the wellness dimensions (see the 8 Dimensional Model of Wellness below outlined by the Institute for Wellness and Recovery Initiative, CSP-NJ^[11]). The following attempts to outline a framework for mental health recovery. Throughout 2010 we will highlight many aspects of these dimensions as they relate to personal and professional practices.

Eight Wellness Dimensions

(1) Physical

- Recognizing the need for physical activity, diet, and nutrition while discouraging the use of tobacco, drugs, and excessive alcohol consumption.
- Attention to physical and physiological signs of stress.
- Balancing the physical dimension by creating a self defined daily routine that includes adequate sleep and rest, walking or exercise, appropriate levels of activity and productivity, and involvement in creative or structured activity that counteracts negative stress responses.
- Learning to assume personal responsibility and care for minor illnesses and also knowing when professional medical attention is needed.

(2) Spiritual

- A broad concept that represents one's personal beliefs and values; having meaning and purpose, and developing a sense of balance and peace. Our spiritual dimension recognizes our search for meaning and purpose in human existence. It includes the development of a deep appreciation for the depth and expanse of life and natural forces that exist in the universe.
- For many people healing and health is enhanced by exploring, respecting, and incorporating personal values and beliefs and awareness of a being or force that transcends the material world and gives a sense of connectedness to the universe.
- For many people, the spiritual dimension is closely related to cultural, religious, and/or spiritual traditions.

(3) Social

- The social dimension encourages contributing to the environment and community and emphasizes the interdependence between ourselves, others, and nature.
- Our ability to communicate our needs and ideas with people who support and care about us.
- Personal relationships, important friendships, and connection with people, pets, and the community.
- Like all other dimensions, people's social connectedness and social wellness varies greatly. Some people have a few relationships, others have many. Some people have most of their relationships in one area of their lives, others have broader relationships.
- For many people, relationships involve a sense of reciprocity *and* equality.

(4) Intellectual

^[10] Swarbrick, M. (1997, March). A wellness model for clients. *Mental Health Special Interest Section Quarterly*, 20, 1-4.

^[11] Collaborative Support Programs of New Jersey

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- Recognize our creative abilities and find ways to expand our knowledge and skills while discovering the potential for sharing those gifts with others. Lifelong learning, application of knowledge learned, and sharing knowledge.
- The intellectual dimension can be activated through a wide array of activities. Many people find it useful to set aside time regularly to pursue personal interests, such as reading books, magazines, and newspapers and engaging in other means of keeping abreast of current issues and ideas.

(5) Emotional/Mental

- The capacity to recognize our feelings; involves the ability to express feelings, adjust to emotional challenges, cope with life's stressors.
- Ability to assess our strengths, limitations, and areas we want to develop further.
- Tolerance, and the awareness of and acceptance of a wide range of feelings in ourselves and others.
- The ability to live and work independently while realizing the importance of seeking and appreciating the support and assistance of others.
- The ability to take on challenges and recognize conflict as being potentially healthy.

(6) Occupational

- The opportunity to participate in activities that are meaningful and rewarding, and provide meaning and purpose.
- Activities that reflect personal values, interests and beliefs.
- Personal satisfaction and enrichment in one's life is derived from participation in work and volunteer activity as well as other activities and tasks from which we derive pleasure and satisfaction.

(7) Environmental

- The environment includes our living, learning, and working spaces and the larger communities where we participate as citizens.
- Good health can be fostered by occupying pleasant, stimulating environments that support our well-being. Additionally, good health can be enhanced by places and spaces that promote learning, contemplation and elicit the relaxation response.
- Being able to be and feel physically safe, in safe and clean surroundings, and able to access clean air, food, and water.

(8) Financial

- Refers to the *objective* perceptions and *subjective* indicators of individuals' personal financial status. *Objective indicators* may include measures such as income, debt, savings and aspects of financial capability such as knowledge of financial products and services, planning ahead and staying on budget. *Subjective indicators* may include an individuals' perception of satisfaction with current and future financial situation

PERSONAL WELLNESS, RECOVERY, AND QUALITY OF LIFE

by Peggy Swarbrick, Jay Yudof, & John Garafano

Our society is full of people dealing with distress at all levels. People are dissatisfied with their bodies, and seek to lose weight through both conventional and unconventional means.

People are distressed by the effects of a challenging economy, and find themselves not able to spend or save the way they used to. Some of us deal with significant medical issues, and physical pain. Some of us deal with significant mental/emotional issues.

Some of us find solace from use of various substances (food, cigarettes, alcohol, chemicals), or engage in various behaviors to excess (work or exercise). Some of us are overburdened with duties of work, life, and family care. Some of us are dealing with “many of the above.”

The unifying factor is “wellness,” or how these challenges impact our sense of **balance**.

“Wellness is a conscious, deliberate process that requires that a person become aware of and make choices for a more satisfying lifestyle^[1].” “Conscious and deliberate” implies that wellness does not just happen, but rather occurs when a person becomes aware of how they are feeling or what they are doing.

“Making choices” emphasizes the voluntary nature of setting a wellness goal or plan. While we may seek advice and support from many people, a wellness plan cannot be imposed on us, and one which we do not choose to follow will not be effective.

Wellness planning can begin by taking a personal inventory of one’s wellness dimensions (as depicted in the table on the next page).

Wellness involves:

- planning,
- setting goals,
- setting priorities,
- breaking up our goals into measurable action steps,
- identifying and accessing resources needed to accomplish those steps,
- taking action,
- tracking progress and
- adapting plans to overcome challenges.

We also know (and need to remain unaware of) the need to prevent overload and manage the interaction of various wellness initiatives.

Many different resources (people, books, websites, community organizations, and more) may be available in the world to help us with our wellness initiatives. We often need to assess various resources, decide which ones to *adopt*, and then how to *adapt* them to meet our individual needs. We are all intelligent people, and we can benefit from what we know about our own experiences (prior successes, challenges as well as the wisdom of others. We all have a sense of our own capacities for sprinting (fast, high energy initiatives) and for distance running (slow, steady efforts towards a long haul). We probably have a sense

^[1] Swarbrick, M. (1997) A Wellness Model for Clients. *Mental Health Special Interest Section Quarterly*. 20, 1-4.

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that wellness initiatives are about life changes rather than short-term modifications, which habits of various kinds take some time to adopt, that some changes will be uncomfortable at first, and that few things in life go according to plan. We need to support ourselves in wellness initiatives, and not be discouraged as we encounter challenges and modify goals.

The table on the next page provides wellness dimension specific examples to support your personal wellness planning.

Sometimes we need to reward ourselves for the effort, rather than punish ourselves for not achieving set goals. At the same time, we need to keep an eye on our goals and how the steps we are taking make us feel.

Balance is an important concept in personal wellness initiatives. We want our lives in balance – time for work, play, family, community, our physical selves, and our spiritual selves. We all understand the idea that one can have “too much or not enough of a good thing.”

People who feel they have a high level of wellness may have more ***resilience*** – the ability to deal with and bounce back from various kinds of challenges, such as stress, emotional trauma, physical pain and illness, financial setbacks, etc. It also seems that high levels of personal wellness in most or all dimensions may contribute to a higher ***Quality of Life***.

Words of Wellness

	Dimension Definition	Challenges	Examples
Physical wellness	The maintenance of a healthy body, good physical health habits, good nutrition, and exercise, and obtaining appropriate health care.	I get out of breath climbing a flight of stairs.	I will walk up a flight of stairs twice a day for the next 30 days.
Intellectual wellness	Lifelong learning, application of knowledge learned, and disseminating knowledge.	I rarely find my brain stimulated.	I will spend 30 minutes 5 evenings reading a book or newspaper. I will enroll in a computer class at the library.
Environmental wellness	Being able to be and feel physically safe, in safe and clean surroundings, and able to access clean air, food, and water.	I do not feel safe living in my neighborhood.	I will save money each month so I can live in a safer apartment. I will find a safe place in my neighborhood for recreational activities.
Spiritual wellness	Having meaning and purpose and a sense of connection to the world.	I feel disconnected with people and have a sense of emptiness.	I will find a cause in the world which interests me, and devote some time to helping others.
Social wellness	Having healthy relationships inside and outside a family, and having an interest in and concern for the needs of others and humankind.	I do not feel I have many friends and feel lonely.	I will participate in a recreational outing with friends or look for ways to meet new people.
Occupational wellness	Having an occupation which provides meaning and purpose beyond economic rewards.	I feel that my current job brings me no more satisfaction than a paycheck.	I will look for ways to find more meaning in my work, or consider changing jobs.
Emotional wellness	Involves the ability express emotions, adjust to challenges, cope with life's stressors, and enjoy life.	I find that small issues make me upset.	I will find a self-help book that can help me learn perspective and balance, or seek out a therapist. I will journal and reflect on my daily challenges and successes.
Financial wellness	The ability to have financial resources to meet practical needs and achieve satisfaction, along with the skills needed to achieve and maintain these resources.	I have no economic reserve, and worry that an illness or major car problem could put me in deep money trouble.	I will set and work a spending plan so I can build some savings.

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Part of the philosophy we hold in our institute is one that personal well-being, balance, resilience, and quality of life are all aspects of **recovery** from psychiatric, emotional, and substance/chemical addiction challenges. A wellness philosophy embraces personal responsibility in the form of self-care approaches toward health and quality of life; people can learn health promoting behaviors and maximize personal satisfaction. This is a viewpoint which is more consistent with a recovery model than with a disease model (i.e., you have the following things wrong with you, they take something away from you, and you need to treat them). Looking at one of the most common definitions of mental health recovery^[2],

“Recovery is a deeply personal, unique process of changing one’s attitudes, values, feelings, goals, skills and/or roles. It is a way of living a satisfying, hopeful, and contributing life even with limitations caused by the illness. Recovery involves the development of new meaning and purpose in one’s life as one grows beyond the catastrophic effects of mental illness.”

one can easily see the close mappings between wellness and recovery.

You will find this newsletter and our website (www.welltacc.org) to be one of many sources of ideas about wellness, including pieces on philosophy and quite a bit of more detailed “nuts and bolts.” Whether you consider your journey to be one of wellness, self-growth, or self-exploration, we hope to be of use to you, and look forward to learning about your experiences. nleditor@cspnj.org.

^[2] Anthony, WA (1993). Recovery from mental illness: The guiding vision of the mental health service system in the 1990’s. *Psychosocial Rehabilitation Journal*, 16(4), 11-23.