

Whole-Person Wellness For Vital Living Jan Montague, MGS

Why Wellness...Why Now?

Newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and the Internet—all are constantly reminding us that our population is aging. Haven't we always been aging? Well, yes and no. Never before in our history have we had so many older people living so long. Life expectancy at birth has increased about thirty years, from 47 years of age in 1900 to about 76 years old in 1996; and, demographers predict the number the number of people aged 65 and older to increase to 69 million by the year 2030. To understand the enormity of growth within this defined market, in 1980 there were 25.7 million individuals 65 and older in the United States. From 1980 to 2050, this group is projected to nearly double, from 12% to 23% of the population.

This demographic shift has numerous implications for both individuals and society; perhaps the most vital is the concern surrounding health care needs and resources. Proponents of the “live longer and healthier” model cite research that indicates older people have increased knowledge and awareness about the importance of health management--including both traditional and integrative medicine techniques. Research also shows that older people are more health conscious than other age groups and when health promotion programs are available, accessible, and appropriate, older people participate. For example, information provided from American Sports Data Research in the report, *Tracking the Fitness Movement*, showed the 55 and older market leading the way for healthy living.

- Individuals 55 and older had the largest percentage of frequent (29%) participants in fitness activities than any other group;

- The number of people 55 and older who exercise frequently has soared 75% since 1987, to 14.2 million;
- 2.7 million belonged to a health club;
- More than a million lifted weights twice a week.

However, as the older population increases in numbers and age in the coming years, some fear that medical costs will continue an upward spiral at alarming rates. To address this concern, the wellness concept has emerged as a model that can lead not only to decreased health care consumption but improved health and quality of life for many Americans.

The desire for optimal health as we age, to be functionally-able for as long as possible, has people embracing the concepts of wellness as a leading model of health management. The wellness model promotes self-responsibility for health and well-being within all areas of a person's life. This model incorporates a holistic perspective--the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. It integrates, balances, and blends the six dimensions of wellness: emotional, social, intellectual, physical, spiritual, and vocational into individualized programming. Research shows that for many aging individuals, participation in whole-person health programs slows the aging process and promotes independence.

The Shift In Perspective

The wellness concept is emerging as a model that can lead not only to decreased health care consumption but improved health and quality of life for older Americans. But why are we having this conscious change in perspective? And why now? Several factors are contributing to this shift to a wellness focus:

- the high cost of healthcare
- relevant research
- nationwide acceptance of integrative therapies
- changing demographics and baby boomer influence

These factors drive the change in perspective in an attempt to keep seniors healthier and proactive towards aging. At the same time, older adults increasingly recognize the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. Together, these forces are creating the momentum towards wellness that we see today.

A Wellness Philosophy

The desire for optimal health as we age, to be functionally-able for as long as possible, has older people embracing the concepts of wellness as a leading model of health management. The wellness model promotes self-responsibility for health and well-being within all areas of a person's life. This model incorporates a holistic perspective--the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Wellness was first conceptualized by Dr. Halbert Dunn in the mid 1950's. In his book, *High Level Wellness*, he defined wellness as, *an integrated method of functioning which is oriented toward maximizing the potential of which the individual is capable within the functioning environment*. More recently, the National Wellness Institute, the principal organization for wellness education, training and research in the United States, defined the wellness concept as six dimensional. The six dimensions that embody personal wellness are, emotional, intellectual, physical, social, spiritual, and vocational. *Wellness* is a life-growth process that embodies the philosophy of holistic health. It is the integration of mind, body and spirit throughout life's journey. Simply stated, what you do, think, feel, and believe has an impact on your health and well-being.

■ Emotional

The emotional dimension emphasizes an awareness and acceptance of one's feelings. It reflects the degree to which an individual feels positive and enthusiastic about one's self and life.

This dimension involves the capacity to manage feelings and behaviors, accept your *self* unconditionally, assess limitations, develop autonomy, and cope with stress.

■ Intellectual

The intellectual dimension promotes the use of one's mind to create a greater understanding and appreciation of oneself and others. It involves one's ability to think creatively and rationally. This dimension encourages individuals to expand their knowledge and skill base through a variety of resources and cultural activities.

■ Physical

The physical dimension promotes participation in activities for cardiovascular endurance, muscular strengthening, and flexibility. This multi-faceted dimension is relative to each person's abilities and disabilities. It promotes increased knowledge for achieving healthy lifestyle habits, and discourages negative, excessive behavior. The physical dimension encourages participation in activities contributing to high-level wellness, including personal safety, medical self-care, and the appropriate use of the medical system.

■ Social

The social dimension is humanistic, emphasizing the creation and maintenance of healthy relationships. It enhances interdependence with others and nature, and encourages the pursuit of harmony within the family. This dimension furthers positive contributions to your human and physical environment for the common welfare of your community.

■ Spiritual

The spiritual dimension involves seeking meaning and purpose in human existence. It involves developing a strong sense of personal values and ethics. This dimension includes the

development of an appreciation for the depth and expanse of life and natural forces that exist in the universe.

◆ Vocational

The vocational dimension emphasizes the importance of giving and receiving. It is the process of determining and achieving personal and occupational interests through meaningful activities. This dimension encourages goal setting for one's personal enrichment. Vocation wellness is linked to the creation of a positive attitude about personal and professional development.

Effective whole-person wellness programs incorporate the wellness dimension(s) with personal wellness concepts that include self-responsibility, optimism, self-directed approach, self-efficacy and personal choice. These concepts change the focus from what people *can't* do to what they *can*. The result is fully integrated wellness.

Research Answers Questions

Research shows that for many aging individuals, participation in whole-person wellness programs slows the aging process and promotes independence. In 1987, the MacArthur Foundation's *Study Of Aging in America* provided a new framework for the study of aging and quality of life. Spearheaded by Drs. John W. Rowe and Robert L. Kahn, the study was designed to examine the factors responsible for the positive aspects of aging. Its goals were "to move beyond the limited view of chronological age and, to clarify the genetic, biomedical, behavioral, and social factors responsible for retaining—and even enhancing—people's ability to function in later life."

The MacArthur Foundation provided more than 10 million dollars in support and thousands of older adult participants. During a period of 10 years, the results from dozens of interdisciplinary research projects were examined. The

combined data from those studies provided the best evidence that successful aging is *not* determined by genetic inheritance. Instead, we age successfully by incorporating wellness concepts and beliefs into all aspects of our lives.

Pertinent conclusions from the MacArthur Foundation *Study on Aging in America* include the following:

Mental function. The ability to maintain a high level of mental function was attributed to a strong social support system; regular physical activity; education and lifelong intellectual/vocational activities; self-efficacy (a belief in one's ability to handle what life has to offer); social connectedness; and reducing feelings of isolation, whether actual or perceived. The interdisciplinary studies found that isolation was a powerful risk factor for poor health. The more frequently older people participated in social relationships, the better their overall health.

Physical function. Not surprisingly, seniors participating in regular physical exercise and activities experienced better overall health than their contemporaries who did not. Improvements in physical function included increased strength, endurance and flexibility; improvements in mood, balance, coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, colon and rectal cancer, diabetes and related problems, arthritis and osteoporosis; and a reduction in the number of falls.

Self-Efficacy. Study participants who approached life with a “*Yes, I can!*” attitude generally had the best coping skills and greatest self-esteem. Self-efficacy can be increased by undertaking a specific action or activity that challenges one's sense of self-sufficiency without overwhelming it. Self-confidence is also bolstered by the presence of supportive and reassuring others or the experience of succeeding at something with confirming feedback from others.

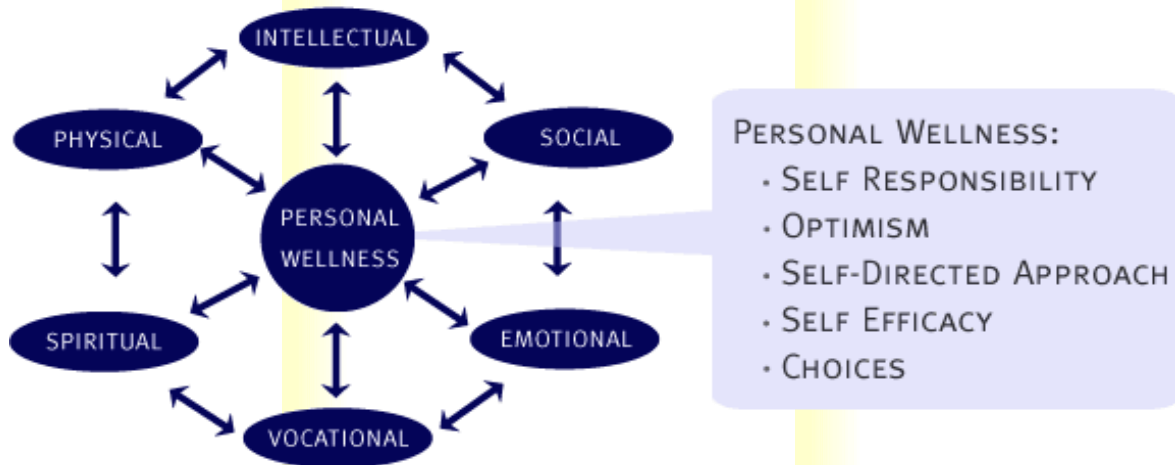
Conclusion

Society is beginning to embrace a new perspective ... *healthy aging*. Today, people are more likely to be defined by what they can do, rather than what they can't do. Seniors are becoming role models for younger cohorts because they are achieving desirable health outcomes by combining whole-person wellness principles with self-responsibility for health.

Current research is showing that the wellness model is not a passing fad. In the coming years, more and more senior living communities and senior service organizations will adopt wellness as their core philosophy. By choosing wellness, they will set the new standard by promoting successful living. We must continue to focus on prevention, whole person involvement, and the implementation of programs and services that keep people healthy in mind, body, and spirit throughout their life-span.

Whole-Person Wellness Model

WHOLE-PERSON WELLNESS MODEL



MONTAGUE, 1994

Whole-Person Wellness

- The integration of an individual's multiple dimensions into positive beliefs and meaningful activities.
- Wellness is relative to the individual.
- The process and attainment are behavior specific.
- Wellness has nothing to do with age.
(Montague, Eippert & Associates, 2005-2006)

Wellness

An intentional choice of a lifestyle characterized by personal responsibility, balance and maximum personal enhancement of physical, mental, and spiritual health (*Healthy, Wealthy, & Wise*, Wellness Councils of America).

Wellness Promotes:

Concepts of moderation, rather than excesses;
 Balance among various facets of life activity;
 The importance of a personal role in shaping one's health;

Providing a broad framework for the integration of activities to enhance human functioning and quality of life;

The pursuit of individual efforts and to be as healthy as possible in the areas of physical, mental, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual health.

(*Planning Wellness: Getting Off to a Good Start*, Larry S. Chapman, MPH).

Wellness

Is a Choice

Is a Way of Life

Is a Process

Is an Efficient Channeling of Energy

Is the Integration of Body, Mind, and Spirit

Is the Loving Acceptance of Yourself

Is the Artful Balance of Purposefully Blending Body, Mind, and Spirit.

(*Wellness Workbook*, Ryan, Travis, 1988)

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About the Author

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