

In modern America, behavioral healthcare has been viewed as an area of wellness separate and distinct from healthcare in general. All too often, a psychiatrist might joke that he remembers little about medicine or the therapist admitting that they have little knowledge or experience with physical health... despite the fact that the human body makes no such distinctions.

The human body knows, for example, that...

- Exposure to early trauma and chronic stress may be a risk factor for both mental and medical disorders.
- Socioeconomic factors, such as low income and poor educational attainment, are associated with mental disorders and medical conditions.
- Endocrine dysfunction or disorders may be associated with mood and personality disorders.

Because of the relationships among physical, mental, and social factors and high rates of comorbid physical illness, increased integration of care could significantly improve the care of people with mental illness and promote a higher quality of life.

Today's acceptance of and expectation that behavioral healthcare and physical healthcare be bi-directional has placed an added responsibility on the mental health clinician to actively explore the eight domains associated with personal wellness and document the ongoing evaluation, applied strategies, referrals and follow-up to appropriate resources in the client record.

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 broadly but often tend to focus on the physical dimension. Programs and state authorities view wellness narrowly, in terms of physical health. Although 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 is a brief history of the term wellness followed by a wellness framework. Consider this framework 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.

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.

For centuries, philosophies of good living, health, and well-being have evolved within societies. Since early times, the ancient Greeks went to temples to remove themselves from the stress

and pulls of life. They focused on diet, relaxation, and self-examination, which were believed to help restore energy and vitality, as well as a sense of wholeness, harmony, and balance. Individuals were viewed holistically. Music, arts, exercise, healthy nutrition, play, and imagery were seen to promote healing and health.

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.” 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 defined high-level wellness 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.

Wellness is not the absence of disease, illness, and stress but the presence of...

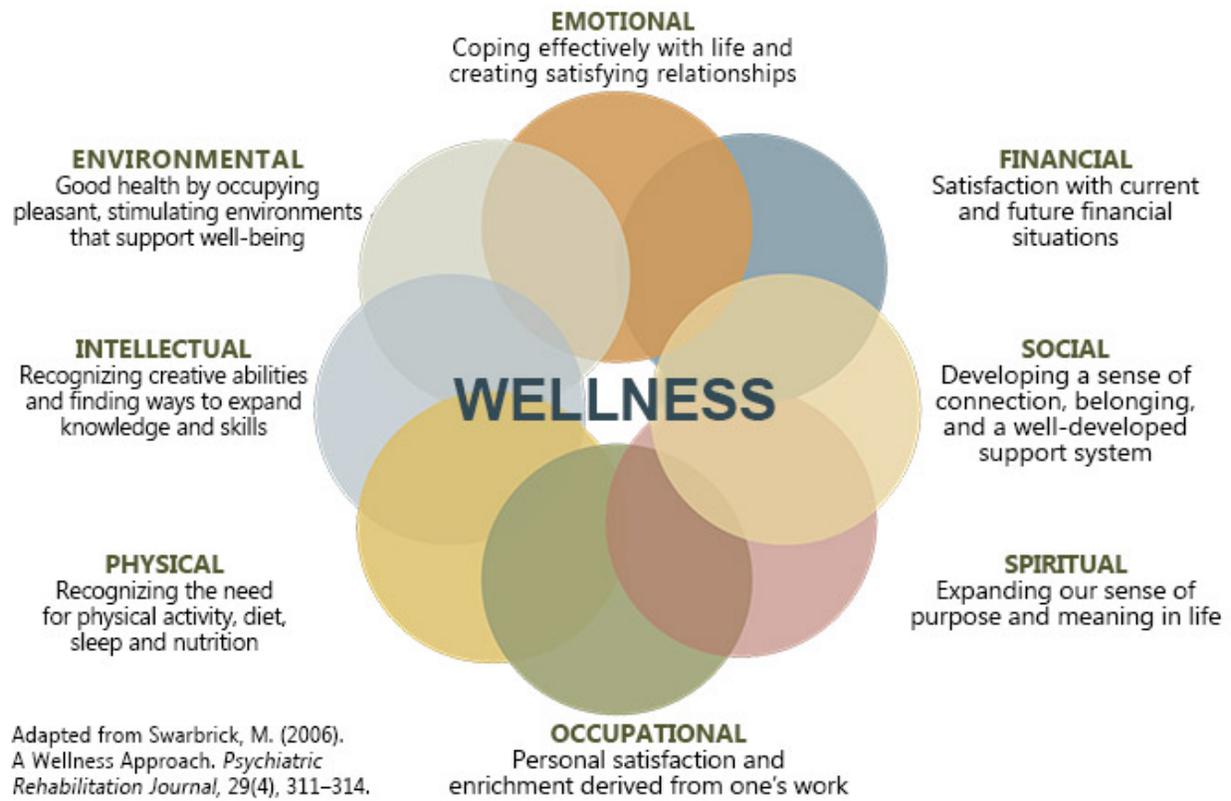
- Purpose in life.
- Active involvement in satisfying work and play.
- Joyful relationships.
- A healthy body and living environment.
- The presence of happiness.

WELLNESS IN MENTAL HEALTH

Wellness approaches for mental health practice have been proposed in recent years. 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 health habits such as adequate sleep and rest, productivity, exercise, participation in meaningful activity, nutrition, productivity, social contact, and supportive relationships.

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.

EIGHT WELLNESS DIMENSIONS



The following model includes eight dimensions of wellness — physical, spiritual, social, intellectual, emotional/mental, occupational, environmental, and financial — and attempts to outline a framework for mental health recovery.

Physical

Research has found that the rates of mortality and morbidity among people with serious mental illnesses and disabilities are not only alarmingly high in comparison to the rest of the population, but that these rates are increasing. Additionally, research has found that many of the factors contributing to this disparity are preventable, such as smoking, substance abuse, infectious diseases and suicide. Some additional factors, such as obesity and diabetes, are often results of side effects of the very medications used to treat these mental illnesses.

Recognizing the need for physical activity, diet, and nutrition while discouraging the use of tobacco, drugs, and excessive alcohol consumption.

- Paying 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 knowing when professional medical attention is needed.

Promoting physical health might involve strategies like...

- Educating on the benefits of physical health and the reduction of deficiencies or disorders.
 - Assisting the client in setting up a physical activity regimen appropriate to their unique strengths.
- Educating the client on the benefits of healthy nutrition.
 - Assisting in referring client to a registered dietician or other nutritional service.
- Assist clients to identify, locate, and evaluate accessibility of screening sites or imaging centers.
- Assist clients to get medical support regarding immunizations.
- Offer education on sexuality and reproductive health issues.
- Provide a trauma assessment and evaluate for current abuse.
- Assess smoking history, educate and offer resources for smoking cessation.
- Assess history of alcohol and other drug abuse and offer resources for treatment.

Spiritual

A broad concept that represents one's personal beliefs and values; having meaning and purpose, and developing a sense of balance and peace. The 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 are 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 spiritual traditions.

Social

- The social dimension encourages contributing to the environment and community and emphasizes the interdependence between ourselves, others, and nature.
- The 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 vary 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.

Intellectual

- Recognize 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.

Emotional/Mental

- The capacity to recognize our feelings; involves the ability to express feelings, adjust to emotional challenges, cope with life's stressors.
- The 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.

Occupational

- The opportunity to participate in activities that are meaningful and rewarding and that 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.

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 and contemplation and elicit the relaxation response.
- Being able to be and feel physically safe, in safe and clean surroundings, and access clean air, food, and water.

Financial

- Objective indicators may include measures such as income, debt, savings, and aspects of financial capability such as having knowledge of financial products and services, planning ahead, and staying on budget.
- Subjective perceptions may include a feeling of satisfaction with one's current and future financial situation.