

HEALTH



More Than the Absence of Disease

Health care reform. Health policy. Health professional. All imply that we know what we mean when we talk about health. Do we?

Health. Picture it for yourself. What do you see? Smiling people eating good food and enjoying one another's company? Someone standing in a graceful yoga pose at the shore? Whether we see someone alone or with others, in nature or a gym, smiling or serene, we all have our own images of what health is. The World Health Organization defines health as:

"a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". Health is "a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living."

This definition is similar to the notion of whole person health or holistic health. Although it helps a bit in identifying different domains of health, it is not terribly specific, and it may not be true for everyone. Can a person who has high blood pressure be healthy? Does everyone define health the same

way, regardless of age, gender, cultural background and individual life experience? Might we have different values and priorities for different aspects of our health as we move through different experiences?

For researchers and policymakers trying to identify the best or most cost-effective treatments, a definition needs to imply something that can be measured, recorded, and used to measure quality of care or outcomes of treatments. Also, focusing on our positive health goals (not just avoiding disease) may give us new insight into the best strategies to reach them.

As a physician, I've become more and more interested in helping my patients achieve THEIR goals. For some, falling asleep easily and sleeping through the night is a higher priority than getting their weight into a "normal" range. As a health professional, it is up to me to serve my patient's goals and values, not to impose my goals or strategies on someone else, even my patients. Of course, I'm happy to share my knowledge and professional opinions, but I'm trying hard to do a better job of waiting until I'm asked.

As a researcher, I've noticed that historical, research has focused on diseases, not people. But people are more than their ailments! While clinicians are devoted to compassionate care of patients, researchers are dedicated to enhanced understanding. Researchers decide the primary study outcome (less pain, lower blood pressure, elimination of bacteria, biopsies that show the cancer is gone) and the interventions used to achieve those outcomes (usually medications or surgery, but sometimes music, meditation or natural products). The researcher's quest is primary; the study participant is not in charge and has a vote only about whether to participate, not how the research will be conducted. In double-blind, controlled trials, participants have to agree to be randomized to different study interventions, putting their treatment into the hands of chance and agreeing to remain ignorant of exactly what treatment they will get until the study is over. No wonder that fewer than 25% of those screened typically enroll in and complete a study.

Wouldn't it be a fascinating twist if the research of the future focused on the optimal ways to achieve an individual person's goals and allowed those goals to change over time? This is actually starting to happen with new N-of-1 study designs, but we still have a long way to go. Before we can get there, we need a new way of understanding and defining individuals' health in all the relevant dimensions: physical, emotional/mental, spiritual and social.

Hasn't someone already done that? Not exactly. The International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems or ICD is published by the World Health Organization (WHO); it is a system that classifies diseases, not health! The ICD codes are used to help document rates of morbidity (illness) and causes of mortality (death). In the US, ICD codes are controlled by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) and the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA). Medicare, Medicaid and most US insurance companies use ICD codes to determine reimbursement (payment) rates. Isn't it interesting that the international (WHO) and US (NCHS and HCFA) institutions devoted to health are all focusing on disease? Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could develop a new international classification and reimbursement system based on health rather than disease?

To get a practical start on the vision of better care, research and payment mechanisms, let's look at different domains of health one at a time. Which aspects of these different health

By Kathi J Kemper, MD,



dimensions are YOUR top priorities? How does reflecting on these attributes help you think more proactively about what steps you can take to improve your own health? What else is important to you that isn't on these lists?

Physical Health

When we think of optimal physical health, we may think of top athletes like Olympic stars, tennis champs or golf pros. Characteristics of optimal physical health include:

- Balance
- Breathing easily
- Comfort (not pain)
- Coordination
- Ease (not dis-ease)
- Feeling well-rested
- Flexibility
- Freedom from heart disease, stroke or circulatory problems; cancer; infectious diseases; arthritis; and other illnesses, injuries and disabilities
- Gracefulness
- Optimal physiologic function and structure (weight, blood pressure, heart rate, blood chemistries, etc.)
- Resilience in the face of physical challenges
- Strength
- Stamina/Endurance
- Vigor and Vitality
- Other; what other physical health goals are important to you?

For each of these characteristics, how important are they to you? 0 = not very important, 10 = extremely important. Rating their importance will help you get a sense of your own individual priorities for physical health.

Emotional-Mental Health

Mental health doesn't necessarily mean you are a math whiz, a chess champion or a MENSA candidate. It doesn't mean you never grieve or that you never feel frustrated. Just like great



Personal & Professional
Life Coaching

Over-the-Phone
Sessions

Complimentary
First Call



LucyWellmaker.com • 336-632-1940



*30-day
Free Trial*

Try it FREE for 30 Days! (just pay \$7.95 for S&H)

Human Clinical Trials Have Been Conducted on
Our Product & The Results Are Amazing!

Call Today! Colleen Smith 336.575.8707
or visit online: www.smartergrapes.com

athletes can get bruised, yet recover quickly, those with great emotional/mental health can experience sorrow, loss or anger and return to a healthy baseline. Take a look at these mental/emotional characteristics of good health:

- Alert and yet able to relax when desired
- Able to concentrate, pay attention or focus, yet daydream when desired
- Balanced
- Calm and confident, yet prudent
- Cheerful, joyful, generally happy
- Clear thinking (clarity)
- Consistent
- Contentment without complacency

- Curious
- Deliberate, intentional
- Discerning, insightful
- Flexible, adaptable
- Hopeful
- Innovative, able to think outside the box
- Memory functioning well
- Organized
- Passionate
- Patient
- Realistic
- Resilient in the face of mental or emotional stress
- Secure
- Other; what other mental-emotional

health goals are important to you?

Which is most important to you today and how would you rate your own emotional/mental health on the characteristics that are most important to you?

Spiritual Health

You don't need to be a saint or even particularly religious to have good spiritual health. Spirituality refers to a sense of ethics, values, meaning and connection with something greater than one's individual self such as nature, a cause, a community or Spirit. Specific characteristics of spiritual health include:

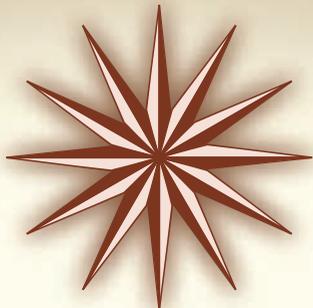
- Acceptance
- Artistic or musical appreciation
- Balance in ideals and practicality
- Compassion
- Connection with something greater than self, such as Nature, Higher Power, God, a set of principles, past/future generations
- Ethics
- Forgiveness
- Generosity
- Integrity
- Kindness
- Loving
- Meaningful, purposeful life and experiences
- Presence (being present in this moment)
- Value-driven
- Wisdom
- Other; what other spiritual health goals are important to you?

Which is most important to you and how would you rate your own spiritual health today on the characteristics that are most important to you? Are there any you'd like to improve?

Social Health

You don't need to be an extravert, a politician or party girl to be socially healthy. On the other hand, no healthy person is an island! Being socially healthy means having positive connections with other people in your life, knowing you can count on others and they can count on you. Specifically,

- Accountable, responsible
- Civic-minded (good citizen)
- Communicating clearly
- Empathy with others
- Fiscally responsible with shared re-



SALEM TAVERN



Something old, something new ~

**For the entertainment of
friends and strangers.**

Main Street, Old Salem

FOR MORE INFO:
www.SalemTavern.com
336-748-8585

Fine dining in the heart of Old Salem

sources and about debts

- Friendliness
- Harmony –getting along with different kinds of people
- Listening well to others' needs, values, thoughts and emotions
- Loyalty, being a team player
- Neighborliness
- Reciprocal, able to give and receive, living the Golden Rule
- Respectful of others
- Responsible
- Role model
- Team player
- Volunteer
- Other; what other social health goals are important to you?

Which aspects of social health are most important to you today and how would you rate your own social health on the characteristics that are most important to you? Are there any you'd like to improve?

The above lists were given to health professionals in a variety of settings last spring, and something really interesting happened. The doctors, nurses, nutritionists, pharmacists and social workers started thinking about health, and not just disease! What do you think were the top health priorities among mostly middle-aged health professionals? Normal blood pressure? Nope. Normal cholesterol? Nope. Lower risk of cancer, infections or injuries? Not even close. The top priorities were: Normal weight, more restful sleep, less stress, being a better listener, more flexible, more focused and more present. Are you surprised? What do you think might happen if you went to your doctor with a list of your top health goals and asked for some help in achieving them? What might happen if you wrote to your representatives in Congress and asked them to ensure that the National Institutes of Health did research on these kinds of health goals, not just on diseases?

As you reflected on each of the characteristics of physical, mental-emotional, spiritual and social health, you might have noticed that none of them included specific diseases or diagnoses. That was intentional. Health is more than the absence of disease. It is a set of positive attributes. When we think of disease, our culture conditions us to think of medical strategies to correct it. When we think

about health, a whole new set of possibilities emerges.

Once you start clarifying your goals and setting priorities (which is the most important right now? which do you think will be most important for you over the next year?), then you can start to brainstorm about which strategies might be most helpful in achieving them. What might be one or two things you could try today to help you move closer to your goals? Here are some possibilities: eating differently, exercising more, seeing a doctor or a counselor, starting a new medicine or natural product, taking a class, spending more time in nature, joining a civic group, volunteering, planning a celebration for someone important, learning to meditate, getting a massage, planning a family vacation, cleaning house, practicing a long neglected instrument, organizing your desk, ending a smoking habit, drinking less alcohol, going to an art gallery, learning to meditate. The possibilities are nearly endless.

Please let us know how YOU picture health, what YOUR health goals are (especially if you have a few that were not on these lists) and how reading this article helped you think in new ways about your health and ways to live a healthier life. If

you're willing to share your insights, we'd like to share your story with others. Thanks for taking the time to consider what good health means to you. With your help, maybe we can move from the ICD (International Classification of Disease) to the CHI (Classification for Health Internationally)!

A pediatrician, Dr. Kemper is the Caryl J. Guth Chair for Complementary and Integrative Medicine at the Wake Forest University School of Medicine and the Director of the Center for Integrative Medicine at Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center. She is the author of The Holistic Pediatrician, and her next book, Mental Health, Naturally is due out in March 2010. Dr. Kemper also serves on the Natural Triad Advisory Board.

Editor's Note: In mid-October, we will be sending a What Is Health Survey to our email list. If you do not currently receive our ezine, but would like to participate in the survey, please visit www.NaturalTriad.com/listserve.html

All surveys are anonymous; no email addresses or phone numbers will be requested on the survey.

New Massage School Opening!

625 hr Professional Massage Therapy Diploma Program

Full Continuing Education and Advanced Training Program

Kneaded Energy[®] School of Massage

404 State Street Greensboro, NC

www.kneadedenergyschool.com
336-273-1260

Enrolling NOW!

