

Health Notes by Evelyn Ames Concept of High Level Wellness

The origin of the term, "High Level Wellness," is credited to Halbert L. Dunn (M.D., Ph.D.). In the late 1950s, Dr. Dunn introduced the concept of high level wellness in a series of radio lectures he gave in the Washington, DC area of Virginia. These lectures provided the basis for his book, *High Level Wellness*, which was published in 1961. He stressed that the definition of health should be a positive one instead of health meaning the "absence of disease."

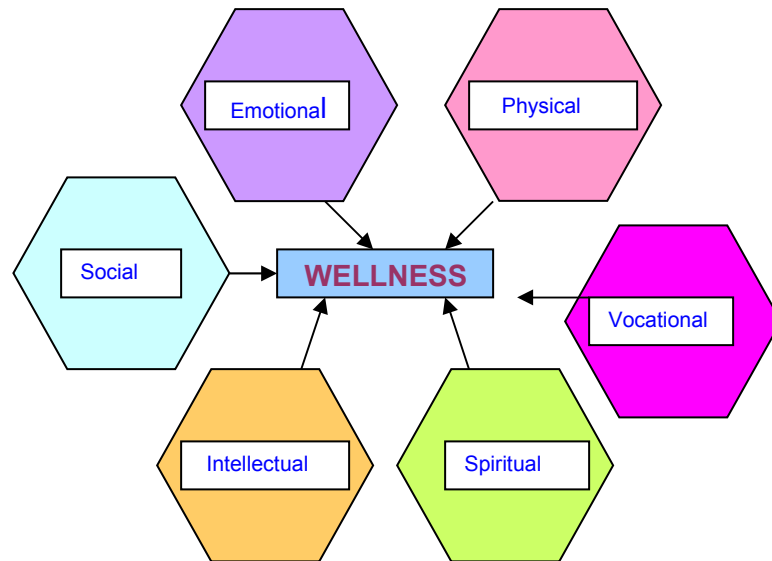
Halbert Dunn's explanation of high level wellness. It is "an integrated method of functioning which is oriented toward maximizing the potential of which the individual is capable, within the environment where he is functioning" *High Level Wellness*, R. W. Beatty, Ltd., 1961; *Health Values: Achieving High-Level Wellness*, vol. 1, Jan/Feb 1977). "This definition does not imply that there is an *optimum level* of wellness, but rather that wellness is a *direction* in progress toward an ever-higher potential of functioning." A person finds ways to function at a high potential within an ever-changing environment. Acknowledging that physical deterioration does occur, Dunn focused attention on factors other than physical mobility and capacity in relation to older adults and their capacity to achieve or not achieve high level-wellness. He firmly believed that "the state of being dynamically well involves the exploration and participation by the individual in the fascinating and ever-changing panorama of life itself" (A Report on the Ninth Annual Southern Conference on Gerontology, University of Florida, March 19-20, 1959).

High Level Wellness involves: (1) direction in progress forward and upwards towards a higher potential of functioning; (2) an open-ended and ever-expanding tomorrow with its challenge to live at a fuller potential; and (3) the integration of the whole being of the total individual—body, mind, and spirit—in the functioning process.

Eight Points of High Level Wellness: ways by which a person can promote wellness include a:

1. willingness to face inconsistencies in our thinking.
2. willingness to hear and examine the other fellow's viewpoints with an open mind.
3. Willingness to encourage freedom of expression of those around us.
4. Willingness to adjust our own views.
5. Willingness to make time for unhurried contacts with others when such relationships are essential.
6. Willingness and determination to give credit and recognition to others when it is due them.
7. Eagerness and determination to serve others as opportunities arise.
8. Willingness to give freedom to those we love.

Generally, the term "wellness" is used rather than high-level wellness. The American Senior Fitness Association web site (www.seniorfitness.net/Wellness%20Solution.htm) describes the six dimensions of wellness (physical, emotional, intellectual, social, spiritual, and vocational) that are currently included in many health texts.



Recent Australia studies suggest that the "wellest of the well" possess the following qualities, to an uncommon degree: (a) high self-esteem and a positive outlook; (b) a foundation philosophy and a sense of purpose; (c) strong sense of personal responsibility; (d) good sense of humor and plenty of fun in life; (e) concern for others and a respect for the environment; (f) conscious commitment to personal excellence; (g) sense of balance and an integrated lifestyle; (h) freedom from addictive behaviors of a negative or health-inhibiting nature; (i) capacity to cope with whatever life presents and to continue to learn; (j) grounded in reality; (k) highly conditioned and physically fit; (l) capacity to love and an ability to nurture; (m) capacity to manage life demands and communicate effectively.

In 370 B.C., Hippocrates alluded to wellness, when he stated the following:

"All parts of the body which have a function, if used in moderation and exercised in labors to which each is accustomed, become healthy and well developed and age slowly. But if unused and left idle, they become liable to disease, defective in growth and age quickly."

American Senior Fitness Association.

<http://www.ajph.org/cgi/reprint/49/6/786> pdf document of Dunn's explanation of high-level wellness (from American Public Health Association)