

How can we account for our wellbeing?

by Jim Lucey

Wellbeing is the human experience of good health. It is often said that our 'health is our wealth' but how can we account for our wellbeing? My experience as a psychiatrist has taught me there is 'no health without mental health' and so my preference is naturally for 'mental wellbeing'. Since there is so much confusion today sceptics demand that these understandings become more concrete – more numerate.

Better accounting for our wellbeing would be good for our health services. Today's healthcare debate needs more than just talk. We need better numbers and benefits that are genuinely measurable. With better accounting for our wellbeing our hopes for healthcare would amount to more than just empty words.

Healthcare is like any other imperative. 'If you're not measuring it, you're not managing it'. So, what should we measure? One answer is to look more closely at 'wellbeing'. Our commonplace healthcare data is overwhelming. Its numbers distress us every day and with this noise comes too little hopeful signal. The resulting confusion gives us the impression that healthcare is neither measured nor managed.

In reality, healthcare would be more effective if we prioritized the right numbers. These are the parameters of 'wellbeing'. With the right numbers we could empower ourselves and our leadership to provide more effective healthcare strategies. We could define our terms and agree on what is to be measured. With these goals and targets a great deal becomes possible for individuals and for society. This measurable 'Wellbeing' agenda relates to three enduring healthcare issues, Wellness, Recovery and Resilience.

This brief article will reference these three measurable agenda so central to our 'wellbeing'. These are:

1. **Wellness** -The 8 features and The 5 ways,
2. **Recovery** - The 5 features called 'CHIME'; and

3. Resilience - The 6 domains of Resilience.

Wellness

Wellness is not the same as the absence of disease. Our health goals are in constant flux and so they require clarification, but our search for understanding is dogged by competing claims and conflicting recommendations. Obviously, we need more reliable forms of communication, but we also need to re-value what we're measuring. A fresh process of evaluation would determine new health service goals and help us invest in the effective interventions that we need. That is why a renewed focus on wellbeing is essential for the healthcare industry and for ourselves. A progressive renewed description of wellbeing is what I call a 'whole new plan for a living'.

It begins with the eight features of wellness as described by SAMHSA – (the substance use and mental health service administration of USA). Wellness is a combination of these:

1. **Physical**
2. **Financial**
3. **Occupational**
4. **Environmental**
5. **Intellectual**
6. **Social**
7. **Emotional**
8. **Spiritual.**

This description of 'wellness' is inclusive and multidimensional, and each aspect can be measured. It is a concept we can aim for. No one achieves a maximum score on all of these parameters all the time.



Invariably some of these health dimensions will be in deficit, but this shows where we can target our new plan. Our whole new plan for wellbeing becomes the addressing of these gaps. Next, we need to know the ways to wellness. There are five of these.

5 ways...

The '5 ways...' are the things that well people do. They were first clarified by the economists at the New Economic Foundation (NEF) after the great recession of 2008. The NEF presented this data to the economic powers at Davos to justify their 'alternative' to 'austerity'. According to the NEF economic recovery depended on the 'wellbeing' of the people in the marketplace. Unfortunately, the logic of austerity won the day, and the global leaders chose to invest in their currencies rather than human beings, but just imagine if the marketplace had been restored by investment in the wellbeing of healthy consumers and producers. The outcome of the great recession would have been very different. Hopefully when our next shock comes around, we will remember that healthy economics restore healthy lives and that would be better for everyone.

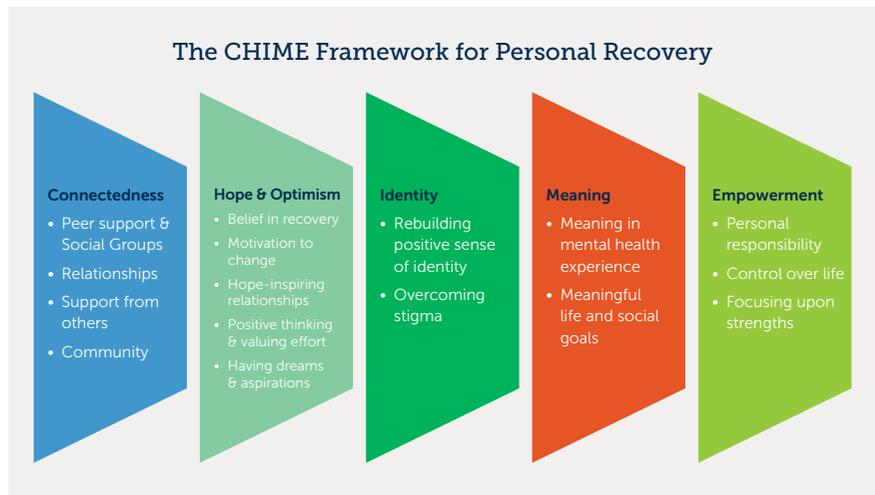
These are the 5 ways to wellbeing described by the NEF:

Well people -

1. Connect with each other
2. Keep active
3. Take notice
4. Keep learning and
5. Give

Recovery

A life of 'wellbeing' includes times of stress and distress. When 'wellness' is lost we need the ability to recover, but what makes our recovery possible? Research tells us that recovery depends on five inter-related human capacities. These are known as the CHIME features. CHIME describes the things which enhance our ability to restore our wellbeing.



Chime stands for:

1. Connectedness
2. Hope
3. Identity
4. Meaning and
5. Empowerment.

Chime' is a list of the things that enable our recovery. Many years of experience in healthcare have taught me that our plans for wellbeing only succeed if they CHIME. Any population, any society, any community which promotes these characteristics will be well. It will be capable of overcoming the privations which come – whether these are economic downturns, wars or pandemics. Difficulties like stress and disease are inevitable but 'wellbeing' also means knowing how to recover. It is about Resilience.

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to bounce back after difficulties that arise. It is not one single characteristic.

Rather resilience is a feature of 'wellbeing' made from a number of vital human capacities.

These resilient qualities are adapted throughout our life. They were first described by Michael Rutter after his experiences as a child during the Second World War. We enhance our wellbeing and bounce back from distress by building on these features.

The six domains of resilience are:

1. Education
2. Security
3. Social competency
4. Friendships
5. Talents and interests and
6. Positive values

Wellbeing and 'resilience' are a summation of all these things. We become more resilient when we restore any one of these domains because these qualities make us elastic and adaptable. Through them we can 'begin again'. With these essences we can make our whole new plan for wellbeing come to life.



We can build on our recovery knowing that our resilience is generated by these valuable human resources. Each day we have a fresh chance to grow our resilient domains, to build on our education, to foster our talents and to reignite our friendships. Redefining our positive values for ourselves and for each other can help us to become more aware of the things that are important in our shared journey to wellbeing.

Conclusion

It's time to redefine our understanding of health and to discover a broader concept of 'wellbeing'. This brief article has enumerated some inter-connected wellbeing concepts. These ideas transcend all the others in health.

We can identify who we really are and take more care of what we're really about by empowering each other to be authentically well. By investing in these resilient qualities of education, security, friendships, talents and interests and positive values we can re-build our wellbeing in measurable ways, restoring our towns, our homes and our workplaces with genuine wellbeing as our goal.

This vision of wellbeing needs to be expressed in more practical ways for each individual but lets synthesize these ideas and begin to describe our unique whole new plan with specific tools for our wellbeing. Here is a list of ten tools for personal wellbeing. I hope you enjoy them!

Ten Tools for Wellbeing

1. **Respect** - yourself and others.
2. **Consider** – time to ponder your life and its opportunity,
3. **Be quiet** - for some part of everyday -whether you pray or meditate or simply allow yourself a break from the 24-hour news cycle – be quiet for a time
4. **Balance everything** – your sleep, eating, working, exercise and relationships
5. **Refresh your concepts** – think of your worries as concerns reflecting your values.
6. **Believe in your recovery** - empower yourself with this faith.
7. **Hope** – make this is your daily exercise – make it your mantra- an essence of your life.
8. **Connect** – with those you love and with the things you love to do.
9. **Limit your distress** - e.g. your use of social media – move away from anything hostile or toxic
10. **Play** – re-discover your sport, music or recreation, and laugh – reach out – not in.

Coda

Wellbeing is an inclusive health concept. By considering it we discover something: our need for connectedness. We can make wellbeing happen. By enhancing our space, by sharing our wellbeing with others, by connecting our lives, we can empower one another to embrace being well.

So, let's re-think our wellbeing. Let's restore ourselves with the prospect of our wellbeing and imagine a life filled with laughter despite our struggles. This resilient life would be more elastic. We could bounce back more effectively with a whole new plan for wellbeing. This would undo the panic in our hearts and defuse the inflammation in our bodies. With a new plan for wellbeing, we could recover all the things that chime.

Wellbeing is a restorative notion. It's rooted in health science, and it could work for us all.

We can identify who we really are and take more care of what we're really about by empowering each other to be authentically well.



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