

CREATING WELLNESS AS AN EVOLUTIONARY PARADIGM FOR MEDICINE

Ewa Stelmasiak

The Wellness Institute, Warsaw, Poland

The practice of medicine dates back to ancient times while the wellness theory emerged in the United States in 1961 with the work of Halbert Dunn, followed by groundbreaking models developed by John W. Travis in 1972, as well as the concepts of Bill Hettler, Donald Ardell and others. Their work contributed to the movement for a deeper and wider understanding of health and brought about a new vision called the paradigm of creating wellness. Throughout the years humanity sought answers to such questions as: is a world without disease at all possible? What are root causes of disease? Movements like psychosomatic medicine, mind-body medicine, behavioral medicine, lifestyle medicine, as well as integrative healthcare options bring their answers to complete the picture of the mystery of human healing. According to the evolutionary theory authored by Ken Wilber and Barbara Marx Hubbard external systems (such as healthcare) reflect the state of human awareness. The current global rise in human consciousness undoubtedly manifests organic changes in the practice of medicine which evolves in alignment with it. As named by Deepak Chopra, evolution happens in quantum leaps or jumps from one level of functioning to a higher level, which is true both for individuals and societies as a whole.

According to wellness pioneer John W. Travis “diseases and symptoms are (...) the body-mind-spirit’s attempt to solve a problem – they are a message from the subconscious to the conscious”, they are the whole being’s lack of ease manifesting in the form of illness. The state of health of a patient can be pictured as a tip of an iceberg visible on the surface of water while deeper realms remain hidden under it. In 1948 the World Health Organization defined health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. This view has been further developed by John W. Travis in his acclaimed Wellness-Illness Continuum where he explains that the treatment paradigm can bring the patient up to the neutral point, where the symptoms of disease have been alleviated, and furthered on to higher levels of wellness through awareness, education and growth. The wellness paradigm “is not meant to replace the treatment paradigm, but to work in harmony with it” (John W. Travis). Wellness means living a life with self-responsibility and self-love, while experiencing it as a journey of self-growth leading to self-actualization.

Operating in the treatment paradigm, the medical profession is often in the position of “mechanic-lifesaving” (a term forged by Bernie Siegel) consisting of administering drugs and therapies on the patient’s physical body, thus eliminating the evidence of disease and missing the opportunity to address its root causes. In light of health and wellness theory the role of the doctor-patient relationship has the potential to become far more advanced than just alleviating bodily symptoms. Wellness theory invites the medical profession to evolve beyond the treatment paradigm and adopt the paradigm of creating wellness. Creating wellness means seeing the patients as physical-emotional-spiritual entities and relating to them at all levels. More specifically it consists of inviting the patient to look below the surface of the state of physical health (the solely visible tip of the iceberg) into the lifestyle, cultural/psychological/motivational and spiritual levels of her being in order to enter the path aiming at identifying and disempowering root causes of disease through the growth of awareness. This supportive role can be assumed both by the medical professionals and by the health and wellness coaches trained to support the healing process on a behavioral, motivational and emotional level.

The author will discuss existing wellness definitions and models created by various wellness founding fathers and present her own definition of wellness which is “becoming fully alive and expressed in and for the world”. Next, she will tap into the role and characteristics of healing partnerships and how they can be included in the relationship between the doctor and the patient. To conclude the author will propose seven key implications of the health and wellness theory for the practice of medicine and advocate for a new healing model where the patient is in the center, while the doctor becomes a member of the healing team together with the health and wellness coach. In this model the ultimate responsibility for health lies in the hands of the patient, while healing is considered to be a creative process leading to a conscious, beautiful and healthy life regardless of the current state of health.