



A Brief History of Wellness

James Strohecker

Wellness is a very hot contemporary trend, not only in the United States and Canada, but worldwide. Everywhere you look you will see the evidence: wellness centers are rapidly springing up in hospitals, clinics, and fitness centers; medical spas and wellness spas are on the rise; wellness coaching is a hot new field; wellness and body-mind-spirit health is omnipresent in women's magazines; and "wellness" is now a common name for a myriad of health products, from vitamins to pet foods.

How Did This All Come About? Why now?

To get to the root of the matter, we need speak about recurring cultural trends going back into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the US and over 3,000 years in the ancient civilizations of Asia and Greece that will help create a context for understanding the booming wellness trend in the twenty-first century.

These ancient cultures had systems of medicine that possessed a sophisticated understanding of the principles necessary to promote and maintain human health and wellbeing. All focused on the whole person – understanding that good health encompasses a balance in body, mind and spirit. These were the original systems of holistic medicine on the planet.

An Emphasis on Lifestyle

They also placed a great emphasis on lifestyle to maintain this balance throughout one's life – diet, exercise, proper sleep, moderation in all things, ethical behavior, promotion of positive thoughts and emotions, and the importance of one's spiritual nature, through prayer and meditation.

Hippocrates, the father of western medicine, was the most important figure in Greek medicine. Some of his basic principles of healthy living still resonate with us today 2,500 years later. Here are some of his best known statements:

- "Let your food be your medicine, and your medicine be your food."
- "Walking is man's best medicine."

- “Natural forces within us are the true healers of disease.”
- “It is more important to know what sort of person has a disease than to know what sort of disease a person has. “

If Hippocrates were with us today, he would be a very highly paid wellness consultant, and probably viewed with some suspicion by the medical establishment!

India is the home of yoga and meditation as well as the system of medicine known as Ayurveda, which translates as “the science of living”. The first chapter of the most important Ayurvedic text, the Charaka Samhita, from the renowned sage & physician, Charaka, is devoted to the “Quest for Longevity.” Fast-forward 3,000 years and we see the immense impact of yoga and meditation on our culture in the past forty years in the areas of fitness, vegetarian diet, stress management, anti-aging and human potential. And, in more recent years, Ayurveda has been making inroads into our spas, yoga centers, and wellness centers.

Ancient China was the home to an amazing system holistic medicine, based on herbal medicine, diet, acupuncture and qigong (system of internal energy management). Today we see the popularity of tai chi and qigong nationwide – you can see people practicing tai chi in the morning in the parks of almost any major city of America. The practice of Acupuncture is now licensed in 45 states.

Other ancient systems of medicine also shared these values, including Unani in Persia, Native American Medicine, and shamanic medicine in numerous other cultures.

The principles of these ancient holistic systems of medicine are playing a big role in the emerging wellness movement today.

Now let’s fast forward to more recent times.

Natural approaches to health and the importance of lifestyle is part and parcel of the American spirit, going back to our earliest years. In fact, the concern among certain of our founding fathers of the potential danger of a monopoly of one system of medical thinking was so great, that Dr. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and Physician to George Washington said these prophetic words:

“Unless we put medical freedom into the Constitution, the time will come when medicine will organize into an undercover dictatorship....To restrict the art of healing to one class of men and deny equal privileges to others will constitute the Bastille of medical science. All such laws are un-American and despotic and have no place in a republic.....The constitution of this republic should make special privilege for medical freedom as well as religious freedom.”

I can hardly think of a more prophetic quote about our current medical system.

The 19th and early 20th centuries were a hotbed for natural therapies and a more holistic approach to health. Homeopathy and naturopathy came to the US from Germany in the 1840s, and two uniquely American forms of medicine, chiropractic and osteopathy were founded in the later 19th century. In fact, the American Homeopathic Association predates the American Medicine Association. Herbal medicine was widespread. Colleges of naturopathy, homeopathy, and chiropractic flourished.

Sanitariums, such as the one at Battle Creek, Michigan founded by natural health pioneer, John Harvey Kellogg, flourished at the time, helping people to regain or maintain good health through diet, exercise and other lifestyle measures. Kellogg's, now the largest maker of cereal in the world was founded in 1906. Another food giant, Post Cereals, was founded by C.W. Post in Battle Creek in 1895.

I own a book published in 1900 that my grandmother originally used to take care of her family's health. It is titled, *The Ralston Gardens of Life: A Study of Health and the Best Way of Living including the Natural Cure of Disease and the Perfecting of the Faculties*. There are chapters on diet, exercise, necessity for sunshine and fresh air, hygiene, spirituality, and natural cures. The author, who used the pseudonym Dr. Everett Ralston, was approached in 1900 by the founder of the Purina Whole Food Company to join forces. The new, larger company was named Ralston-Purina.

The natural health movement at the turn of the 20th century led to the creation of some of our largest food companies today. It is interesting to note that these companies have strayed far from their natural health roots, and are now manufacturing devitalized foods, adulterated with chemical additives. Many of their foods are considered to be junk foods. And today, the marketing departments of many of these companies are trying to get on the wellness bandwagon with "natural" and "organic" foods, probably not realizing the irony regarding their origins in the natural health movement.

The natural health-oriented spirit of the times was captured in these words from Thomas Edison, the great inventor and visionary:

"The doctor of the future will give no medicine, but will interest his patients in the care of the human frame, in diet, and in the cause and prevention of disease."

However, healthcare in America took a radical turn at that time, a turn which continues to have a huge impact even today. It was the beginning of what I refer to as the "Medical Culture Wars"

In 1910 the Flexner Report, commissioned by the Carnegie Foundation to determine the most effective system of medicine, was published. The report determined that German Allopathic medicine (based on chemical drugs) was superior to naturopathy, homeopathy, chiropractic, and herbalism. Soon funding for these natural health-based medical schools dried up, and the advent of modern medicine as we know it had begun. Gone was the whole person, systems-based approach of natural medicine and in was the symptom-based, drug-based approach.

Most important was an economic consideration - the ability to patent chemically-based drugs and mass produce them at huge profits. In another 30 years, with the advent of miracle drugs, the burgeoning new pharmaceutical industry had a strong grip on medical education and research in the US. And with the rise of pharmaceutical drugs and our dependence on the quick fix, magic bullet, our focus on the importance of lifestyle in maintaining good health continued to erode.

For about the last one hundred years in America we have been engaged in a medical culture war between two seemingly opposing forces. The first is what I call the **“Culture of Illness”** – represented by the depersonalized, modern medical-pharmaceutical-research complex, which is focused on disease management largely through synthetic patentable drugs. We can also refer to this as the “Illness” or “Disease” model of health. In the illness model, one is considered to be “healthy” if there are no signs or symptoms of illness. Basically, this model infers that is you are not sick, you are considered healthy.

The second, I call the **“Culture of Wellness”**, which is focused on the whole person (body, mind and spirit) and lifestyle, focusing on self-responsibility and teaching and motivating people to a higher levels of vitality, health, and wellbeing. We can also refer to this as the “wellness” or “whole person” model.

In 1948, the World Health Organization developed a powerful definition of health in the preamble of their constitution which juxtaposed the illness and whole person wellness models with the illness model being show to be an insufficient measure of health.

“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity.”

A prominent physician in the US, and a consultant to the World Health Organization, Halbert Dunn, M.D., Ph.D., was very inspired by this definition of health. Dr. Dunn was the former Chief of the National Office of Vital Statistics, U.S. Public Health Service, retiring in 1960, and considered to be the father of the modern field of vital statistics.

In journal articles during the 1950's Dr. Dunn would often lament, "Why is it that we physicians always speak of levels of illness and we never speak of levels of health." During this time he was evolving his new High Level Wellness theory, and after his retirement, he gave a series of lectures that was published in 1961 as the seminal book, *High Level Wellness*. He is considered to be the grandfather and original theorist of the wellness movement.

I consider Dr. Dunn's definition of High Level Wellness (from his book of the same name) to be one of the most foundational definitions of wellness ever written:

"High-level wellness 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."

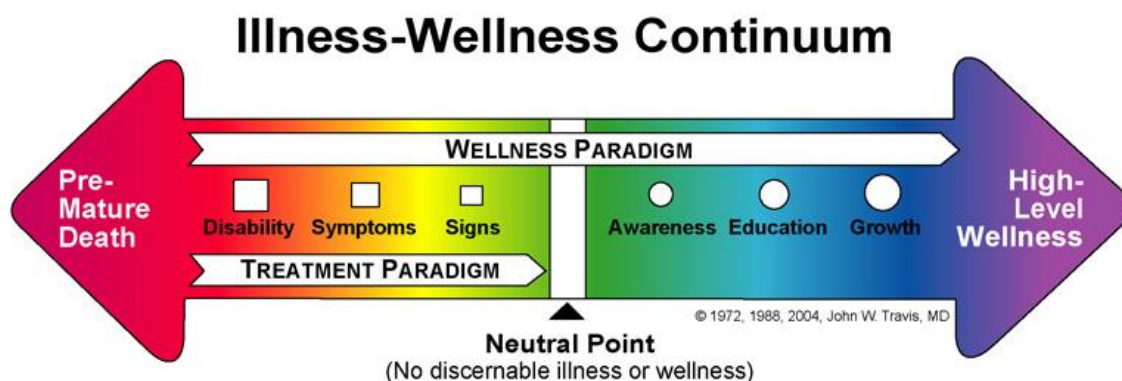
Forty years ago, on the tail of the turbulent 1960s, an incident occurred that had far-reaching implications with respect to this culture war and the "Wellness" movement today as we know it.

In the early 1970s a young resident in preventive medicine at Johns Hopkins, John Travis, MD, MPH, was working with the National Public Health Service, and was a young protégé of Dr. Lewis Robbins, the doctor who created the Health Risk Appraisal (HRA) and founded the Society for Prospective Medicine. He had recently discovered Dr. Halbert Dunn's book, *High Level Wellness*, in a used bookstore at Johns Hopkins and was inspired by Dunn's vision. One night in his office, Dr. Travis came up with a new concept. He called it the Illness-Wellness Continuum.

Key Wellness Concept #1 - The Illness-Wellness Continuum

This is the first of Dr. Travis' 3 key Wellness concepts. It shows the relationship of the Wellness and Treatment Paradigms. This was a melding of Dr. Robbins health risk continuum, Dr. Abraham Maslow's concept of self-actualization, and the earlier model of High Level Wellness from of Halbert Dunn, MD, Ph.D.

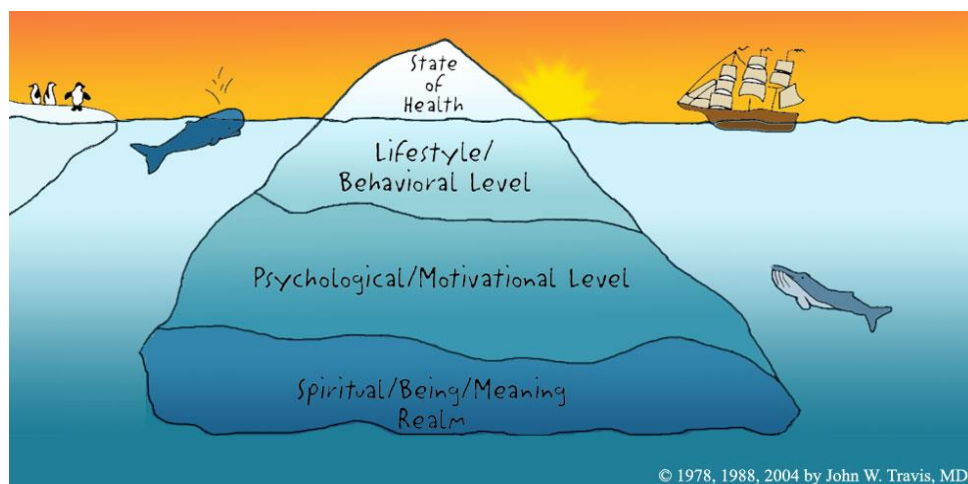
Moving from the center to the left shows a deteriorating state of health. Moving to the right of center indicates increasing levels of health and well-being. The Treatment Paradigm can only take you to the neutral point, where the symptoms of disease have been alleviated. That is all it is designed to do. The Wellness Paradigm, on the other hand, which can be utilized at any point on the continuum, helps you move toward higher levels of wellness.



Dr. Travis decided to dedicate his life to teaching people to be well rather than to treating patients. After completing his residency at Johns Hopkins he moved to California and opened the first Wellness Center in the US in 1975 (Wellness Resource Center) in Mill Valley California. This early beginnings of the wellness movement occurred in the same context that produces the holistic health and human potential movements of the 1970s.

Key Wellness Concept #2: The Iceberg Model of Health

In this model Dr. Travis illustrates that Illness and Health are only the tip of an iceberg. To understand their causes you must look below the surface. These causes include: lifestyle and behavioral level, cultural, psychological and motivational levels, and the deeper, more root causes in the realm of meaning and spirituality. His work at the Wellness Center explored these underlying factors leading to imbalance in our lives. He soon learned that he needed a unique new instrument to assess his clients when they came for a session.



Key Wellness Concept #3 - The Wellness Energy System

“We are all energy transformers,” says Dr. Travis. “All our life processes, including illness, depend upon how we manage energy.” The Wellness Energy System represents the energy inputs and energy outputs of a human being - a whole-person approach to wellness. These 12 dimensions of wellness formed the basis of the pioneering assessment program, The Wellness Inventory, which he created in 1975 as a whole person intake for his new wellness center, was the original wellness assessment.



© John W. Travis 1976, 2004 & HealthWorld Online

Self-Responsibility and Self-Love are the foundation; breathing, sensing and eating are the primary ways we bring energy into our system. The primary ways we use energy in our daily lives include: moving, thinking, feeling, playing & working, communicating, intimacy, finding meaning and transcending or spirituality.

Although Travis' wellness approach focused on the whole person, our corporate and healthcare cultures were not quite ready for this approach in the 70s. The corporate wellness programs that evolved at that time were based more on risk management rather than a whole person approach to wellness. Also, the holistic health movement of the 70s seems to fade away as it entered the 1980s and 1990s.

© 2006, 2015 James Strohecker & HealthWorld Online

Coming Full Circle

Forty years later in 2015, we find ourselves coming full circle, with the trends towards wellness and wellbeing, holistic health, integrative medicine, and a focus on the whole person in body, mind and spirit, have returned in full force, penetrating the collective cultural psyche, the media and our institutions.

At the same time our healthcare system is in a crisis. The federal government has projected nearly \$3.8 trillion in healthcare spending in 2015, almost 17.9% of the GDP. Today, spiraling healthcare costs have made it nearly impossible for an average family to pay for basic healthcare. Companies are struggling to pay their employee's health benefits.

This brings us back to Self-Responsibility. It is universally accepted that there is an increasingly urgent need for us to take a greater level of responsibility for our health and well-being, if we are ever to get health care costs under control. This is the only solution.

The tide appears to be turning in the medical culture wars towards the “Culture of Wellness”. This is particularly true on the consumer side. People are flocking to fitness centers, wellness centers, spas, yoga classes, developing healthier eating habits, taking dietary supplements, exploring meditation, mindfulness, and other techniques for stress management, seeking out life coaches and wellness coaches and looking to develop more balance in their lives.

Stanford Research Institute estimates the global wellness market to be a \$3.4 trillion industry across nine industry sectors.¹ They report that this three times the annual revenues of the global pharmaceutical industry. The times are changing.

The healthcare industry is also responding both to this growing consumer demand and the new cost constraints with a rapidly escalating interest in wellness, lifestyle, mindfulness, meditation, health and wellness coaching, as well as complementary & alternative therapies, integrating these “healthy living” and “wellness” perspectives into a more consumer-friendly model.

The medical/wellness culture wars are beginning to evolve into an era of integration and cooperation rather than one of opposition and competition. And it is this new context that is now leading many of us to be drawn to working with the dynamic Wellness Inventory program and wellness coaching.

1. *Global Spa & Wellness Economy Monitor*, Sept. 2014. Stanford Research Institute.