

EDITORIAL

Human Wellbeing and Flourishing: If Not Now, When?

人类幸福与繁荣：若非现在，更待何时？

Bienestar humano y prosperidad: ¿si no es ahora, cuándo?

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There is a lot that gets in the way of human flourishing. In the world today, we face seemingly unsolvable issues including health disparities, poverty, climate change, food security, clean water, and violence, to name a few. These profound challenges are not unrelated. Lack of education

contributes to unemployment, which in turn contributes to poverty. In communities where there is poverty and an absence of jobs, there is also a higher rate of crime and violence that erodes health and wellbeing. In the United States, we have “failing schools” where children are graduating without the basic skills needed to be successful in life. Failure to complete a 13th year of school is associated with a cascade of adverse outcomes that impact lifelong wellbeing. While nations around the world have invested considerable resources into healthcare systems, much of the focus has been on disease management, and it is not at all clear that investing more in healthcare systems produces either health or, even more importantly, wellbeing.

Wellbeing is a metric that is garnering attention not only at the level of the individual but also within families, organizations, communities, and even nations. Gallup-Healthways, for example, publishes comparative data on wellbeing (<http://www.wellbeingindex.com/2014-global-report>), and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) produces a world happiness report (<http://worldhappiness.report/ed/2015/>). Sustainable development, as described by SDSN, calls for all societies to balance economic, social, and environmental objectives acknowledging that when countries pursue economic growth in a lopsided manner, forgetting about social and environmental objectives, the results can be adverse for human wellbeing.

While policy objectives of nations can significantly impact their populations' wellbeing, people are increasingly looking for self-care guidance and strategies to improve their personal health and wellbeing. The University of Minnesota Center for Spirituality & Healing website “Taking Charge of Your Health & Wellbeing” (<http://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/>) draws more than 275,000 unique visitors per month who are able to develop a personal

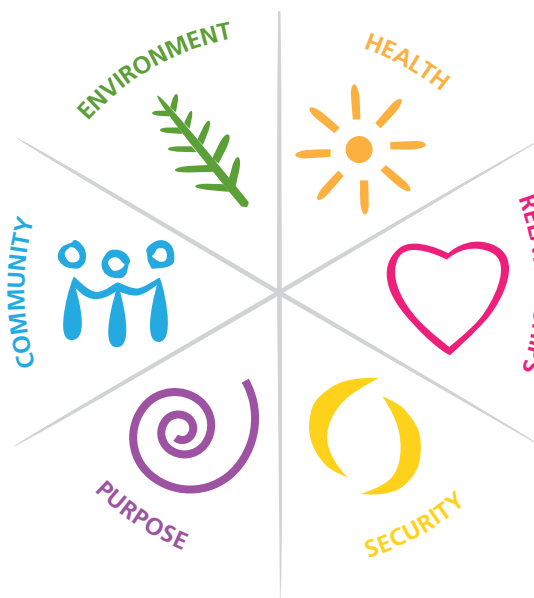


Figure The Wellbeing Model of The University of Minnesota Center for Spirituality & Healing.

plan for health and wellbeing and explore healing practices. Interestingly, close to half of the users are from outside of the United States. As illustrated in the Center's model (Figure), the dimensions of wellbeing include health (physical, psychological, emotional, social, and spiritual), purpose, relationships, community, security, and the environment.

Global advances in health and medicine require a whole-systems approach that goes far beyond reforms within healthcare systems. Intergenerational equity requires that we invest in solutions now that will benefit future as well as present generations. With this mindset, we should be asking ourselves, “What do we need to do within our families, schools, workplaces, and communities today to ensure the wellbeing and human flourishing of those yet to be born?” “If not now, when?” is a reasonable question to be asking ourselves. Which priorities would rise to the top and which investments would we make if wellbeing and human flourishing became a strategic priority as well as a policy imperative? Which decisions could we be making today that would lead to higher levels of wellbeing and human flourishing for present as well as future generations?



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Citation

Global Adv Health Med. 2016;5(1):3. DOI: 10.7453/gahmj.2015.130

Key Words

Wellbeing, flourishing, sustainable development, whole-systems, global advances in health and medicine



To view or download the full-text article, visit: www.gahmj.com/doi/full/10.7453/gahmj.2015.130