A few years ago if someone asked me if I could give the definition of health, my answer would have been much different than it is today. When I thought of what it means to be healthy I was thinking only in terms of physical health, your basic physiological health; weight, blood pressure, cholesterol, etc.. I now understand that to truly be healthy it goes much deeper than just the physical body. This is something that has taken me awhile to really grasp. Although I have taken other courses throughout my studies that taught the importance of treating the body as a whole (body/mind/spirit), it wasn’t until this term that I really understood the concept. I contribute this epiphany to Elliot Dacher’s book, *Integral Health the Path to Human Flourishing*. The guidelines and practices that are put forth in the book have opened up a whole new world of understanding for me. For some time I have felt like something was missing. I knew that I was allowing myself to be overwhelmed with stress, and was wasting too much time with negative emotions but was unable (or maybe unwilling) to get out of this rut. This term really has given me the skills that I was so desperately seeking to help guide me towards a more balanced life. I now believe that I am on the path towards integral health. I know that it will not always be easy, and it will be one that takes much work and dedication. This is a path that there is no end it is a lifetime commitment, one that will continue to develop and grow stronger over time.

**Introduction:**

Why is it important for health and wellness professionals to develop psychologically, spiritually and physically? What areas do you need to develop to achieve the goals you have for yourself?

As a health and wellness professional I have chosen a career that is built on the concept of treating the person as a whole. Treating a patient must go beyond just treating the symptoms or the physical body, balance must be sought by incorporating also the psychological, and the spiritual. For one to be able to help another find balance, he first needs to have balance. I believe that as a health and wellness professional we need also look at ourselves as teachers. Patients will be looking towards us to help teach and guide them, to be able to do this we must have the knowledge and experience. To be able to obtain this knowledge and experience we must continually use the skills we have been taught and seek out ways to further develop ourselves psychologically, spiritually and physically. I believe that there is no end to this development. By pursuing new ways and mastering the old skills we already possess this is how we continue to develop and find balance.

I personally believe that there is always room for improvements, no matter how developed I may feel I am in certain areas. I grew up in a Christian home; I have attended church all my life and consider myself a very spiritual person. With this being said, I do not feel as though I have even begun to reach my full spiritual potential. I find that as I teach the importance of spirituality to my children my faith and spirituality grows stronger. It is important to remember that all growth needs nurturing, and I must constantly seek ways to feed my spirit so that it will blossom and with this peace and balance will be found.

Physical development is an area that again there is always room for improvements. Overall I would say this is an area that is best developed for me. I am a true believer that you are what you eat. I not only preach this, I live it. I eat a very healthy natural and mostly organic diet. I exercise 6 days a week incorporating cardiovascular, weight-training, and alternative exercise (cross-fit, Zumba, kick-boxing, yoga) into my workout regimen. I strive to maintain my weight within a healthy range. I have a healthy heart, my blood pressure, cholesterol levels are all within normal limits. For the most part I am very rarely ill. For some they may say that I am a picture of health, but what I have discovered is this is not what constitutes true health.

Psychological development is where I fall short. This is an area that requires the most work to be able to develop and is probably the hardest. The ironic part is it probably offers the most rewards. I believe that as you develop your mind this will help you grow stronger both physically and spiritually.

**Assessment**

How have you assessed your health in each domain? How do you score your wellness spiritually, physically, and psychologically?

I believe to be able to get a full assessment of your health one must look at all areas. Determine which of the areas you have the most knowledge, spend the most time developing, and where you need the most work. Once you have made this assessment you will know the steps you need to pursue to enrich the areas that are in most need.

Physically as stated in a previous blog I would rank this domain as a 7 on a scale of 1-10. This is an area that I feel I have the most knowledge in, and I spend the most time at developing. I am constantly reading about nutrition and how food affects our bodies. I am one that will read about the benefits of certain foods or herbs and find ways to introduce them into my diet. At the same time I spend 2 hours a day doing strenuous physical exercise. I work with a personal trainer to help guide me in this area. I am willing to try new exercises and if I do not succeed at first, I will push until I do. To be honest I believe I sometimes push my body physically to the limits, whether it be running a race, or during weight lifting training.

Spiritually I ranked this domain as a 6. This is an area that I too spend much time developing. I spend time in prayer daily, I go to church regularly, I teach Sunday school, and I live my life in a way that I put everything in the hands of faith. But it is an area of continual growth, every aspect of my life strengthens my spirituality. I believe that as a human we all fall short of optimal spirituality. To be optimal one would not ever judge, or have negative emotions, would love all, and live a life that is pure and always at peace.

Psychologically I ranked this domain the lowest. I would give it a 4. Until recently this is an area that I knew the least about and spent the least amount of time developing. Although I have attempted to incorporate meditation into my life, I was not very successful. My mind is one that never turns off, it wanders and I was unable to focus to achieve the full benefits. I contribute this to not understanding my reasons for meditation. I wanted it to work and work immediately. I was hoping that it would help reduce my stress levels, but I was unwilling to give it the time and attention that was needed to see results. The guidance that I received through Dacher’s writings have helped me to better understand the process of developing a mindful mind, a loving heart, and guided me towards developing inner peace.

**Goal Development**

List at least one goal you have for yourself in each area: Physical, Psychological (mental health), and Spiritual.

**Physical goal:**

I have been training with a trainer for the past 10 months in the hopes of competing in a figure competition. What I have found is that most women (men too) that want to compete sacrifice nutritional integrity to achieve the image they are looking for. Through this whole process of training my coach has been saying that I will most likely need to drop to an unhealthy weight in order to get the abdominal definition needed for competition. I have made it my goal to continue working, putting nutrition first, and I will compete without resorting to unhealthy measures. It may take me longer, it may be harder, and I may never actually win a contest; but I will continue to strive to reach this goal and be physically healthy the whole way.

**Spiritual goal:**

I believe that it is human nature to exhibit some form of selfishness. I have come to the realization that in order for me to grow spiritually I must work at ridding myself of selfish acts. Although I spend time daily in prayer, I do so more often for my own personal gains, and not often enough in praise and thanksgiving and prayer for others outside my immediate family. My spiritual goal is to dedicate more time for thankful prayer and prayers for others.

**Psychological goal:**

Because this is my most under-developed domain, it will be the area that I need to devote the most time. I must focus the drive that I have in my physical and spiritual development and put that same amount of energy into my psychological development. To accomplish this, it will take daily practice and dedication. Just as physical exercise, healthy eating and prayer have become a daily ritual for me, so will mindful practice. My goal for psychological development will be to have meditation become a daily routine, one in which is not forced one of habit. I believe that once this is accomplished I will find balance and inner peace.

**Practices for personal health:**

What strategies can you implement to foster growth in each of the following domains: Physical, Psychological and Spiritual? Provide at least two examples of exercises or practices in each domain. Explain how you will implement each example.

**Physical Growth:**

To continue fostering growth in this area I must not allow myself to let’s say “slack off”. I must continue with my current daily regimen, always setting new goals for myself. This can be accomplished by always stepping outside of my comfort zone. I now run 5k races, I will make it a goal to work towards running a 10K once that is accomplished I will work towards running a ½ marathon, If I accomplish that I work towards a full marathon. The same is true with my weight training; I will continue working hard to develop muscle definition by not becoming stagnated with my workouts. Muscles love confusion; you cannot go into the gym and constantly do the same thing over and over again and expect a different result. You must keep your workouts fresh and mix it up. Every 4-6 weeks I change my workouts. Each week I work my muscles in a different order and change how I lift, I change how fast I do the repetitions, and how long I rest in between sets, etc.. Along with weight-training and running, I have one day a week that I do something different, whether it be a Zumba class, yoga, Boot Camp. By having a workout set up this way I never get bored and it keeps me motivated. Visualization meditation is another way I can foster further growth physically. This is a practice that is an excellent exercise to help reach your athletic goals. Visualizing yourself doing the activity, and really believing you can do it will help you to actually accomplish it.

**Spiritual Growth:**

To continue fostering growth in this area I feel that the best practices for me at this time are Loving Kindness meditation and the visualization meeting Asclepius. I chose Loving kindness because my spiritual goal is to rid myself of selfish acts and I believe the best way to do that is by the practice of offering loving kindness to others. Unfortunately I am still struggling with this because of personal negative emotions towards certain people that have wronged me. It is easy to show loving kindness to someone you love, and not even that difficult to offer it to someone that has no connection to you, where it is really hard is offering it to your enemy. I feel that is where my second strategy comes into play. The visualization practice of meeting Asclepius, my inner healer, will help guide me towards letting go of my negative emotions towards others and help me to take the necessary steps towards forgiveness, which will eventually allow me to heal and find peace. I will implement these practices by continuing to allot time each day that is designated for these practices. Over the past 9 weeks I have been able to find time each day to do these practices, sometimes it may only be for 5-10 minutes, but it is a good start. As these mini practices become habit, I will increase my practice time. Just as one does not put on their first pair of running shoes and goes out and runs the Boston Marathon, the same applies to meditation practices. It is unrealistic for me to begin trying to sit for an hour at a time, I am taking consistent baby steps this is what will help me to eventually meet my goal.

Psychological Growth:

To continue fostering growth in this area I feel that I must find time to unplug from the world. After reading Dacher’s thoughts on how our minds become so over-stimulated by the constant chatter of the world (Dacher, 2006), I made a commitment that I would spend time each day in peace and quiet. I have implemented this by using my early morning running time for this practice. I now leave my IPod at home and run in silence. I am really enjoying this and I believe that it is fostering growth in my other domains as well. Physically I am able to run further and faster because I am more aware of my breathing and can control it much better. Spiritually I spend time on my run in conversation with God, whereas before I would be singing along with a song. Another strategy that I would like to implement to help me develop psychologically is witnessing mind and calm-abiding meditation. I attempt these practice but as of yet I am not very good at it. I still struggle with my mind wandering. I believe I need to continue using practices like guided meditation and as I learn to quiet and calm my mind a witnessing mind will be seen and then will evolve into a calm-abiding mind. I know this is not something that will happen over-night for me, and I will need to devote practice and patience towards it.

**Commitment:**

How will you assess your progress or lack of progress in the next six months? What strategies can you use to assist in maintain your long-term practices for health and wellness?

I meticulously journal many aspects of my life, which is an excellent way of assessing progress. I have my exercise journal that goes to the gym with me every day, I keep track of the weight used, the reps completed, calories burned, distance run, and how I felt during my workout. I have kept this journal for years. I have a cardboard box that these journals go in when they are full. I can literally go back and see where I began and where I am at now. I do the same with my food log, I carry this with me and write down everything I eat, I started this several years ago when I was attempting to lose weight and it kind of stuck with me. Although I do not have a psychospiritual journal I feel this would be a great idea. For me when I write my goals and intentions down on paper it helps me become more accountable for my behaviors. What I have noticed is that the goals that I take the time to write down and create a plan on how I will accomplish them are the goals that I eventually achieve.

I am only at the beginning of my integral health journey, and I am committed to taking the necessary steps that will guide me in the direction that is needed to reach my goals. I look forward to not only the educational aspect of this journey but more importantly the personal growth and inner peace that will unfold along the way.

Laurie Peterson

Reference:

Dacher, E.S. (2006) Integral health the path to human flourishing. Laguna Beach, CA. Basic Health

Publication Inc.