

Editorial

Whole Health for the Health of the Whole System

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The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is at the forefront of integrating Primary Care and Mental Health [1]. The VA also has a National Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation (OPCC&CT) whose aim is to transform the health care system from a disease-based care model to a health-based care model that aims to make care personal, proactive, and patient-driven [2,3]. One of the tools that OPPCC&CT has created is “the circle of health,” or “The Components of Proactive Health and Well-being [4].”

At Puget Sound VA, we have developed a Whole Health Class based on this diagram, with eight weekly drop-in classes that focus on different health domains such as “working your body” and “power of the mind.” The classes combine motivation, inspirational health videos, education, community building, SMART goal setting, and mindfulness. Veterans do not need to register or wait to start the class, they can drop-in anytime.

As we developed and taught this class to veterans, we realized that we as staff were focusing more on our own health and found teaching the class invigorating and enjoyable. As we began teaching primary care nursing staff about the class, we realized again that there was a dual-nature to the class—on the one hand we were teaching staff new skills for working with veterans, on the other hand we were teaching staff how to care for their own whole health—the health of patients is inseparable

from the health and well-being of the staff. We should not have really been surprised by this since David Kopacz had written a book on this subject examining how to transform the health care system by first attending to the health of clinicians and staff and from there changing the interactions between staff and patients [5]. We cannot give to others what we have not first developed in ourselves! We expanded this aspect of the Whole Health class and recently ran a day-long retreat format for administrative staff as a tool for well-being and self-care and also to familiarize staff with the concepts of Whole Health and Patient-Centered Care. We are also teaching the class to new nurses going through the year-long Transition to Practice curriculum.

The other fascinating aspect of working with this class is that it has been an excellent tool for promoting collaboration across disciplines and service lines and this leads to the integration of care for veterans. We started off focusing on the whole health of veterans and we ended up creating a community of energetic staff and clinicians who are concerned about the whole health of staff, the patient, and the entire system. In these days when provider burnout and stress are such an issue, this Whole Health class has been a panacea that is still working away to transform lives, care, and systems.

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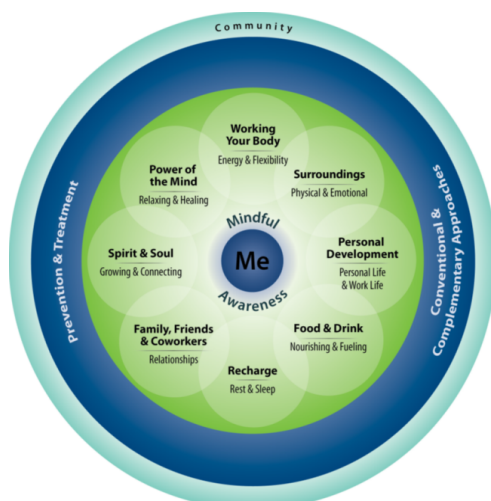


Figure 1: The components of proactive health and well-being.

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