Wellness Course Proposal for College Students

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**Introduction**

The research problem of this paper is the community’s gap of knowledge about healthy living and disease prevention.

The purpose of this paper is a proposal of a wellness course and its benefits for wellness for the college students and community.

This course is in synchrony with the goals initiated by the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (2015), a national initiative of many individuals and agencies to improve the health of all Americans. Health Education Programs outside hospitals and clinics play a key role in promoting wellness and health, and preventing disease, enhancing quality of life and adding years of healthy life. This paper proposes a holistic wellness course with environmental, emotional ,psychosocial, mental, physical and spiritual components.The need for this wellness course resides in the fact that primary prevention is key to good health and wellbeing. It is a safe way to prevent unnecessary human suffering and insurmountable healthcare costs. Health education should be a significant part of the health care offered by nurse practitioners and nurse educators.

**Background**

Typically, the young generation engage in unhealthy behaviors such as irregular sleep schedules, unhealthy diet, substance abuse and sedentary lifestyle

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2014) the most common chronic conditions, such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, kidney failure, cancer, stroke and arthritis are preventable through healthy lifestyle and are costly to our healthcare system. Some health related behaviors such as poor nutrition, lack of exercise or physical activity, tobacco use, and drinking in excess alcohol—are risk factors for the main chronic diseases. In 2012 there were 117 million people with one or more chronic conditions, 78 million adults, 12.5 million children and adolescents obese. About half of United States (US) adult citizens have at least one of the following major risk factors for heart disease or stroke: uncontrolled high blood pressure, uncontrolled high LDL cholesterol, or are current smokers. Cigarette smoking accounts for more than 480,000 deaths each year. Drinking too much alcohol is responsible for 88,000 deaths each year. The total costs of heart disease and stroke in 2010 were estimated to be $315.4 billion, of diagnosed diabetes in 2012 was $245 billion, medical costs linked to obesity were estimated to be $147 billion in 2008 (CDC, 2014). Many acute and chronic conditions can be prevented through education about risk factors and unhealthy behaviors and adoption of a healthy lifestyle.

**Current health educational programs and regulatory requirements**

In North Carolina a mandatory healthful living standard course of study is taught in order to increase awareness of a healthy lifestyle. The course is a combination of two content areas: health education and physical education and a minimum of 1 credit of healthful living is required for graduation from a public high school (Public Schools of North Carolina. State Board of Education, 2015). This course which is taught starting with 10th grade, includes areas such as: growth and development, mental and emotional health, community and environmental health, nutrition, family life, consumer health, personal health, alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, intentional and unintentional injury, and health promotion and disease prevention.

Students in high school are provided with opportunities to explore the effect of healthy behaviors on an individual’s quality of life. The healthy living course assists them in understanding that health is a lifetime commitment by analyzing individual factors and health decisions that promote health and prevent disease. Another course related to wellness taught in high schools is “Physical Education”, that emphasizes health-related fitness and develops the skills and habits necessary for a lifetime of activity. The course provides the students with opportunities to achieve and maintain a health-enhancing level of physical fitness and increase their knowledge of fitness concepts. The program includes skill development in health-related fitness activities (cardiorespiratory endurance, muscular strength and endurance, flexibility and body composition), aerobic exercise, team sports, individual and dual sports, gymnastics, outdoor pursuits, self-defense, aquatics, dance, and recreational games.

High schools offer elective “advanced Physical Education” courses where students participate in physical activity exercises, study physical development concepts and principles of sport and exercise, as well as develop or refine skills and attitudes that promote lifelong fitness. Students have the opportunity to design a personal fitness program.

At college level, courses focused on wellness and healthy living are offered for health seeking majors, such as nursing, public health, physical and occupational therapy.

According to the published curriculum for the Department of Public Health Sciences from UNC Charlotte offers to its undergraduate students several wellness courses such as: “Healthy Lifestyles”, “Health Promotion and Risk Reduction”, ”Mental and Emotional Well-Being”, (UNC Charlotte, 2015). The Wellness Center from UNC Charlotte has designed the Wellness Passport that gives students credit if they attend assigned health and wellness activities within the campus. (UNC Charlotte. Center for Wellness Promotion, 2015).

In the Charlotte and surrounding areas community, Live Well Department within Carolinas Healthcare System (CHS) offers health coaching for his employees 7 days a week in the area of fitness, nutrition, weight loss, smoking cessation, modifying risk factors for heart disease and diabetes, reducing stress and any other topics helps the client to reach his personal goals (Live well Health coaching, 2015).

In the community CHS- NorthEast Health & Fitness Institute offers classes on nutrition, weight management, exercise therapy, stress management, cholesterol education, blood pressure reduction (Carolinas Healthcare System. CMC Northeast, 2015).

Carolinas Healthcare System offers classes on a variety of topics such as plant based nutrition and healthy cooking, deep relaxation and mindfulness, stress management, music therapy, yoga, tai chi, qigong, Zumba, cancer support groups (Carolinas Healthcare System, 2015). They also teach maternity classes that include topics like breastfeeding and infant massage, infant feeding, and safety, CPR , cesarean childbirth, labor support, dads parenting, transition into parenting (Carolinas Healthcare System, 2015).

Health insurance companies do not generally cover wellness and health education services and rarely holistic and naturopathic treatments such as acupuncture, ayurvedic medicine, herbal medicine, functional medicine, homeopathy.

Wellness education and coaching increases a person’s ability to be successful at achieving long lasting behavior change and improvement in health, as in (Moore & Boothroyd, 2006).

Preventive health education and wellness programs have reduced significantly the number of general illnesses, injuries and chronic problems. Employee wellness programs, on average save $3 for every $1 spent, according to (Kurec, 2009).

**Methods**

 This project consists of creating the syllabus for a Healthy Living and Wellness course featuring various areas of wellness, health promotion and disease prevention, addressed to high school and college students.

Keyword phrases for the literature review include the specific areas of interest to include the terms Healthy Nutrition, Physical Activity, Mental, Emotional, Spiritual Wellness… AND the Benefits to Health and Wellness. Full text articles were slected and date range was flexible. Inclusion criterias include articles from all geographical areas such as Europe and China. Hundreds of articles were generated and the most significant were chosen.

Books, sourcebooks, encyclopedias were researched to find out what practices are beneficial to each of the areas of wellness and then those practices were researched in depth using peer reviewed articles (for example for mental and emotional wellness: the practice of meditation, for physical wellness the practice of yoga) .

For the online database search, there were used CINAHL, Pubmed, Psycharticles, Psycinfo, CDC website, United States Department of Agriculture -Scientific Report of the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee , the website developed by the University of California at Berkley: [greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu) , fda.gov, and [nutritionfacts.org](http://nutritionfacts.org), (a website with evidenced based articles and videos on veganism and healthy nutrition) , clinical professor Dr Terry Wahls site terrywahls.com, on multiple sclerosis and other autoimmune diseases, American Sleep Association website.

**Discussion**

There is one basic healthy lifestyle course taught over one semester that can be taken throughout the high school. At college level, health education courses are offered mainly to health related majors. In the community hospital and associated wellness departments and YMCA’s wellness classes are offered on various topics for the patients and clients attending those places.

At present, when access to healthcare and healthcare costs are real problems and when chronic and acute illnesses abound, a serious budget allocation on health and wellness education, is beneficial. Courses on healthy living and wellness are necessary in schools, colleges and in the community, needing time to assimilate into a culture.

**Recommendations**

This proposed course has experiential and learning dimensions. The course would be completed over one semester and it is designed for college students. It is organized in 8 topics spread over 16 weeks. Students will also have to participate in wellness activities and then share their impressions.The course is expected to have a positive impact on the short term, long term health and wellbeing of the students.The outcomes of this course can be measured through self reports at different times (6 months, 1 year, 2 years) upon completion of the course. The self reports will include measures taken for improving their overall health and frequency and severity of acute illnesses.

 **Experiential learning objectives**

The course offers experiential learning that is learning through experience or learning through reflection on doing. According to the Center of Teaching + Learning, the benefits of experiential learning are: students learn competencies for the real world such as how to maintain a healthy lifestyle and adopt new healthy behaviors, students are motivated to learn because they see more clearly the significance of the knowledge , students become self directed, lifelong learners - they reflect on their experience, make sense of what happened and note the differences between the experience and their previous understanding and then they develop a new idea or modify an existing concept; later may participate in workshops to expand their knowledge (The University of Texas at Austin. Learning Sciences, 2015)

**Learning objectives**

Students will be able to understand and describe the multiple dimensions of wellness: physical, emotional, psychosocial, spiritual and environmental.They will be able to summarize the main naturopathic practices beneficial for all dimensions of wellness. They will analyze and evaluate their own wellness and create a wellness vision and plan wellness goals to achieve.

Students will deepen their critical thinking abilities and decision skills about healthy lifestyle. By the end of the course they are expected to apply the knowledge learned in their personal lives.

**Personal growth objectives**

Students will be inspired to grow spiritually, emotionally, mentally and physically.

They will gain deeper personal insights by being invited to create their personal purpose, wellness vision, personal plan and wellness goals. Students will enhance their horizons on how to increase spiritual awareness with prayer, singing, spiritual readings, church attending, pilgrimage, serving a higher purpose. Emotionally they will learn how to cultivate new, positive emotions that would help them grow harmonious relationships with their peers. Mentally they will assimilate how to increase mental focus, practice relaxation, effective time management and stress reduction. Physically they will have the chance to start practicing healthy food shopping, cooking and eating . They will become aware of the importance of healthy sleep and regular circadian rhythm, of healthy and ethical sexual life and prevention against sexually transmitted diseases.

**Community oriented objectives**

 Students will increase sense of community and interconnectedness by being encouraged to share their experiences with others.

Some of the students will do community projects that promote healthy lifestyle.

**Didactic Section**

 The didactic section will include the modules on physical wellness, mental, emotional and spiritual wellness.

 **Environmental Wellness.**

In the environmental wellness module, students will learn how to protect themselves and their environment against the chemicals and other dangerous toxins found in foods, soil, water and air, genetically modified organisms (GMO’s), as well as from high amount of medical and natural radiation. Students will learn to become earth friendly and sustainable, to recycle, preserve resources, do earth- friendly gardening. Students will become motivated to involve in environmental organizations.

 **Emotional and Psychosocial Wellness.**

In this module, students will learn that low stress life with happy social connections are one of the most important things we can do to increase our happiness and wellbeing.They will be presented topics such as stress and time management skills, relaxation techniques, mindfulness, meditation and creative visualization, virtues and positive emotions, yoga, tai chi, aromatherapy, biofeedback and massage.

Students will learn about health benefits of meditation (Horowitz, 2010): improving brain function, reducing stress and psychologic distress, alleviating anxiety and ruminative thinking, increasing immunity, coping and quality of life, peacefulness, self compassion.

Students will be taught how to flourish their emotional well being and happiness by cultivating universalvirtues and positive emotions and strengths such as hope, happiness, gratitude, altruism, compassion, forgiveness, love, openness, mindfulness, passion, growing strong relationships with friends, family and peers of similar interests, practicing good communication skills, being and following a mentor, belonging to fellowships and associations, becoming empowered through serving the community and leadership. Setting and living in accord with one’s purpose has been proven to enhance psychological, physical, and social well-being.

Students will also learn about concepts of positive psychology that studies the ways people achieve happiness and optimal mental wellbeing. Students will discover their strengths using the VIA survey offered by the VIA Institute on Character (2015) and created by Martin Seligman .

**Physical and Mental Wellness.**

The module is about physical wellnessand covers healthy eating, physical exercise, tai chi, yoga, massage, healthy sleep, healthy sexual activity, screening checkups and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, protection against the addictive compulsive habits such as excessive alcohol drinking, tobacco smoking and using of illicit drugs. Healthy eating and physical activity will be highlighted following the American Dietary Guidelines (2015).

Students will learn about research on physical exercise, showing effectiveness in chronic conditions such as depression and anxiety (Leith, 1994).

Students will find out about the significance of a good sleep that is an important part of our health and wellbeing. According to the American Sleep Association (2015), sleep is necessary for our nervous systems to work properly. Sleep helps us concentrate, supports memory and physical performance and ability to carry out math calculations. Sleep also helps to sustain good mood and builds up our immunity. Deep sleep coincides with the release of growth hormone in children and young adults. Deep sleep helps with cell growth and repair of damage from factors like stress and ultraviolet rays, that’s why we can truly call deep sleep "beauty sleep". Deep sleep helps people maintain optimal emotional and social functioning and decision-making while they are awake

Students also learn about massage and aromatherapy that have physical, mental and emotional benefits because they predispose to relaxation, having great influence on the autonomic nervous system, calming down the whole body. Thus relaxing the body and mind they stimulate body to achieve optimum health digestion improves, blood pressure is reduced , pain is eased, hormonal balance is accomplished. Massage enhances the general blood circulation. It can be beneficial in conditions such as reduced peripheral circulation, lymphatic congestion, muscle spasms, tension, anxiety, backache, tension headache, flaccid musculature (Sutton, 2010).

Students will discover the therapeutic uses of aromatherapy such as relief for acne, allergies, asthma, burns, candida, colds, cough, emotional issues, flu, headaches, hormone imbalances, insomnia, mental clarity, pain, sore throat, stomach issues, viral infections and many more (Aroma Tools, 2014).

Students will learn about the benefits of tai chi: as described in (Sutton, 2010), tai chi improves fitness, coordination and agility. It builds up a better posture, flexibility, range of motion, mental alertness and sound sleep. It has been proven beneficial for heart disease, hypertension, arthritis, osteoporosis, sleep disorders, chronic pain, gout, headaches, stress related disorders such as depression and anxiety. The deep breathing of tai chi regulates the respiratory system, helping respiratory conditions such as asthma, emphysema and bronchitis and aids in digestion and digestive ailments.

Students will learn about the effectiveness of yoga for health. According to the (Ross, Friedmann, Bevans, & Thomas, 2013), yoga has multiple mental and health benefits such as improved energy, happiness, social relationships, sleep, and weight. (Ross & Thomas, 2010) conclude from the research done that yoga appeared to be equal or superior to exercise in nearly every outcome measured except physical fitness(where is not completely overpassed in cases of more strenous and complex assanas). The outcomes studied were: in healthy individuals: balance, fatigue, flexibility, heart rate, heart rate variability, menopausal symptoms, metabolic equivalents, stress, total antioxidant status and in diseased individuals: kidney function, pain, psychotic symptoms, sleep disturbance, quality of life, social and occupational functioning, strength, total cholesterol. All those were proven to be better after the yoga practice than the exercise. Yoga has been shown to have immediate psychologic effects: decreasing anxiety and increasing feelings of emotional, social, and spiritual well-being. Yoga has been shown to be effective in relieving symptoms of mental illness including depression, anxiety, obsessive–compulsive disorder, and schizophrenia. Yoga is beneficial for pregnant women and their baby-increase maternal comfort and shorten labor time. Yoga, when added to the components of usual cardiac care in randomized trials, has been shown to be significantly better than usual cardiac care at improving blood lipid levels, decreasing markers of inflammation and in reducing the number of revascular procedures.

Students will be taught about the importance of the annual wellness exam and annual obgyn exam, annual skin exam and screenings for different diseases such as breast cancer, colon cancer, breast and testicles self exam, annual dental exam etc.

The prevention of sexual transmitted diseases by safe sexual practices and committed relationships will be discussed.

Students will be taught about how to identify and prevent excessive alcohol drinking , smoking and illicit drugs using They will be acknowledged about the current practices to cope with these addictions such as practice of meditation, prayer participation in support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous , fellowships and counseling, service for the community and leadership, as well as medical short term interventions.

**Spiritual Wellness.**

In the spiritual wellness and healing module ,students will review ways of improving health through spiritual practices from all over the world such as prayer ( personal prayer, prayers chain/ long distance prayers) and meditation, healing touch, living a meaningful life according to one’s high spiritual beliefs and values, reading of sacred texts, attending spiritual and religious services and fellowships, participating in pilgrimages, creating spiritual arts, volunteering / involvement in humanitarian activities.

One’s personal religious, spiritual beliefs and practices can influence his health.Students will learn that spiritual healing takes into account that the body, mind and spirit are interconnected and interact in a dynamic way in the “whole person”.

According to (George, Larson, Koenig & McCullough, 2000), religiosity and spirituality have been related to better health across a number of studies. Church attendance in particular has been studied extensively, with frequent attendees having better physical and mental health outcomes with stronger social friendships and better health behaviors.

As Dr Herbert Benson concluded after a lifetime research in the video” The power within Healing through prayer” (2011) prayer elicits physiologic changes in the body (lowers blood pressure,heart rate, slows brain waves ) , heals chronic pain, depression, cancer and can treat and cure almost any of stress related diseases ( such as angina pectoris, asthma, Rheumatoid arthritis, duodenal ulcers, skin rashes, all forms of pain, even death). He sustains that spiritual strength , achieved through prayer for example, can overcome any physical limitation and that one’s beliefs’ system is a very significant contributing factor in his health recovery. Belief in God is the most powerful belief and has been shown effective in the curing disease. Long distance prayers of others, prayers chains from friends or community members from church have been shown effective in studies in alleviating disease.

**Naturopathic Therapies.**

In the last module, students will learn about naturopathic therapies, their principles, benefits to health, for what conditions they are most effective.

This module is important because it widens up students perspective about what other healing therapies exist that can be used in addition to the western medicine.

Students will learn about ancient and newer naturopathic therapies such as ayurvedic medicine, naturopathic medicine, functional medicine, herbalism- western and chinese, acupuncture, chiropractice, osteopathy, homeopathy and Bach remedies, biofeedback and neurofeedback, diet therapy, macrobiotics, veganism, orthomolecular therapy, clinical ecology, psychotherapy, counselling, music and art therapy, feng shui, space healing, color therapy and light therapy, hypnotherapy, sound therapy and music therapy.

**Practical Section**

The practical section of the course will require that students attend wellness activities, experience healthy behaviors and naturopathic therapies and then share, present or journal about them. Students will have the choice to select between different activities, projects and topics. Presentations will be creative and use original media such as videos, photos. The goal will be that the whole class acquire knowledge, share the experience of others and get more motivated.

**Summary**

American population today needs a comprehensive, research based education about healthy lifestyle, wellness and prevention of disease . It takes patience and efforts to enforce a culture of healthy living in our country. All ages and socio economic populations should have access to health education. The target population for this course is college students but consideration must be given to incorporate health education initiatives for other groups.

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