

LENT 2018 AND WELLNESS

It seems like yesterday that it was Christmas and we were preoccupied with giving just the right gift to family members.....and now it's Lent and we are wondering what to give up. I'm going to suggest that we use the opportunity Lent provides to give ourselves a special gift. I'm recommending that we give ourselves the gift of wellness/ /good health by beginning during Lent to adopt and practice certain habits, attitudes and strategies that will enable us to be well. Mr. Wilbert White our resident Carpark attendant is concerned about our health; every Sunday morning as we are leaving he says 'Have a healthy week'.

The Ministry of Health uses as their slogan 'Your health is your responsibility' and indeed it is. But what is good health? What is wellness?

In the biblical context health and wellness can equate to wholeness and wholeness to being well in spirit, mind and body. St. Paul, in his letter to the Christians living in Thessalonica, addresses an aspect of their wholeness when he prays for them, *"May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

(1Thessalonians 5:23)

I too am about good health and wellness but I will approach this presentation from a very practical medical perspective.

Initially good health was seen as "the absence of disease" but The World Health Organisation (WHO) expanded on that definition and indicated that health was 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, *(the ability to bounce back from illness and other challenges)* and not merely the absence of disease'. In recent times

they have added to that definition..... ‘the ability to bounce back from illness and other challenges.

Wellness is an old word which dates back to the time of Hippocrates. It refers to

- ‘a special state of health,
- an overall sense of wellbeing in body, mind and spirit,
- a sense of involvement with the environment and
- a feeling of personal satisfaction’.

I think of Wellness as optimal good health. Being as healthy as you can be and full of contentment. The wellness lifestyle has been promoted by scores of persons who have committed themselves to staying well, both physically and mentally by learning how to

- prevent the development of health problems,
- change their eating habits,
- exercise regularly and
- relieve stress.

But how are we to develop this state of optimal good health? We tend to do things in response to a crisissomeone we know is admitted to hospital or worse and we immediately dust off our running shoes and the treadmill and stop eating dessert and for a while we do most of what I am about to say.

Let’s use Lent 2018 as the “crisis” which brings about health changes in our lives. Might I suggest the following simple steps:

1. Firstly, we all need to have a Family Doctor. One physician who really knows you, has your entire medical history including your

allergies at his/her fingertips. Heaven forbid that you should have a major health crisis and are unable to share your own medical history (especially your allergies) with medical personnel in the Emergency Room.

Build up a trusting relationship with your Family physician. Ask questions. What health conditions are you at risk of developing? What health conditions already exist in your family? Talk with your Doctor and make a plan that could prevent you from developing that condition.

Children are not the only persons who need to be immunized. Adults don't like shots any more than children do but you may need shots to protect you from a variety of illnesses. Discuss with your Family doctor your need to have a flu shot every year? Do you need shots for Hepatitis? When is your next Tetanus shot due?

- 2. And what about your Mammogram, Pap smear, Prostate exam, PSA levels and your Colonoscopy? How often should you have these tests done? How old should you be to begin having them?**
- 3. When you visit your Family Doctor it is prudent to have a written list of questions for discussion. If your Doctor does not have the time at that visit to talk, leave the list with him/her and set up some telephone time to discuss your queries.....it's your job to ensure that your questions are answered. Of course you should do your own research but your Doctor's opinion is of value.**
- 4. The simplest strategy to keeping well is having clean hands. Hands need to be washed with soap and water before you eat and after you use the toilet. Don't wait for outbreaks of influenza or gastroenteritis to begin this activity. To have clean hands, It is said that you need to lather your hands with soap**

and water for as long as it takes to sing the first four lines of the 'Happy Birthday to you' song.....and then of course rinse with water and wipe your hands on a clean towel or air dry.

5. **A healthy diet is crucial to keeping well. We all need a diet plentiful in fruits, vegetables and complex carbohydrates and proteins.....remembering to “eat what we grow...” Many of the exercise specialists use as their mantra, “Your food is your medicine”, others say “You are what you eat”. Are you becoming a French Fry? Don't get carried away with eating fast, fried and over processed foods which can promote weight gain. Fruits like ripe bananas are ideal for snacks instead of Cheese Krunchies and Snickers, delicious though they be.**
6. **The Heart Foundation of Jamaica, (supported by the Ministry of Health and other agencies) is determined to get us to understand the significant health risks associated with consuming sugary drinks non-stop and even as we speak is running TV and print media ads to educate us. Diabetes, Heart disease and Obesity are three diseases mentioned in this advertisement.....all very common illnesses in Jamaica, They recommend WATER INSTEAD of sweet drinks. At least 6 – 8 glasses each day. Don't yield to temptation!**
7. **Other Caribbean islands have also identified the high sugar intake of the populace as a significant health challenge. Paul Keens-Douglas, Trinidad & Tobago poet/raconteur wrote a humorous piece entitled 'De Sugar Problem' in which, using his poetic license he advocated reducing the size of the teaspoon in Trinidad without informing the general public. He felt that Trinis just liked to see a full heaping spoon of sugar, so if teaspoons were smaller their intake of sugar would be less!!**

8. **The Ministry of Health's 'Jamaica Moves' program urges us to keep moving, whether we use the stairs instead of the elevator at work, walk or run around our neighborhood, or dance in front of the TV, just keep moving. You don't have to join a gym but you do have to be consistent with whatever 'moves' you choose to do. Try it, again, it takes discipline but you will feel and look a lot better.**
9. **Rest well. We all need a good night's sleep regardless of our age. It is said that seniors need less sleep, in my experience that is not true, we still need six hours at nights and I advocate a short afternoon siesta. The adolescents among us need 8-10 hours of sleep at night.**
10. **I cannot close without mentioning Alcohol and tobacco. Socially acceptable but lethal to persons who overindulge. I cannot think about these poisons without immediately thinking about their effects, domestic and other forms of violence, motor vehicle accidents, traumatized children and house fires, second hand smoke inhalation as well as the major financial implications of responding to the myriad of health ailments and cancers which result from their use.**

Do you want to be in good health?to be well? Then focus on these health messages. You have heard them before, you now have to commit to doing them and doing them consistently.

Make LENT 2018 the starting point. To recap:

- **You and you alone are responsible for your health**
- **You have to make the right food choices**
- **Drink water instead of sweet drinks and**

- **Keep moving even when you are sitting down.**

Last week we began a discussion about wellness/optimal good health. I had suggested some steps to improve our physical health and hope you have had a chance to reflect on these. This week our emotional, mental and spiritual health will be the areas of discussion. Although all these components are discussed separately, they are closely inter-related and must be balanced within each individual to achieve the desired goal of optimal wellness; that “glow of good health and that radiance of inner peace”.

Emotional health is all about our feelings. ‘People who are emotionally healthy are in control of their feelings, thoughts and behaviours. They are able to cope with life’s challenges. They still feel anger, stress and sadness but they know how to manage these negative feelings’. (<https://familydoctor.org>>mental)

For example, if you are able to drive up or down Hope Road, surrounded by racing taxi-drivers and not lose your cool; you know how manage your negative feelings.

Many children with emotional and behavioural problems cannot identify their feelings and more importantly see no connection between their feelings and their behaviour. They respond to the simple question “How are you feeling today?” with “No way, I feel no way”. So, therapists created “feeling faces”, pictures of children looking happy, sad, angry and afraid. With the help of these images, behaviourally challenged children can begin to learn to identify their feelings, recognize the behaviours associated with these feelings and become better at managing their negative behaviours.

Mental health like emotional health is about coping with the normal vicissitudes of life as well as realizing your abilities, working productively and fruitfully and able to make a contribution to your community.

Mental health differs from mental illness. Mental illness is about Anxiety disorders, (panic disorder, phobias, obsessive compulsive disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder etc.) Mood disorders (Major Depression, Bipolar Disorder etc.) and Psychoses (Schizophrenias etc.)

We all have the potential to develop mental illness regardless of our age, gender, race or socio-economic status. Worldwide data suggest that about 15% of persons suffer from a mental illness but here in Jamaica especially in our war torn communities the figures are much higher. The recent school shooting overseas had many of us very anxious but here at home our feelings about the daily dose of horrors on our doorsteps have been numbed and we have become ambivalent about the grief and suffering of our fellow Jamaicans.

We deny the presence of mental illness in ourselves and our families, stigmatise persons with mental illness and show little compassion towards them.

I remember once trying to explain to the parents of a 10 year old girl I was treating, that she had a diagnosis of Depression; before the word was out of my mouth her father responded angrily,“depression, depression, she can’t be depressed when she have a roof over her head, clothes and on her back and she get lunch money every day, me should be the one who is depressed” he continued “both of us can’t live under the same roof, me trying to make her comfortable and she saying she depressed”.

Depression is a common but treatable illness. Adults get depressed, especially women and we should not forget depression after a birth, older men especially post retirement and children also get depressed. Depression can be triggered by any upsetting or stressful life event such as the death of a loved one, divorce, major illness, redundancy, money worries, retirement etc. Family doctors treat depressed clients so you don't have to take the chance of going to a Mental Health clinic or a Psychiatrist and risk being stigmatized.

Children with Depression may not show the classic signs of withdrawal and sadness usually associated with this illness. They often demonstrate irritability and angry or aggressive behaviours. They get into fights at school. They get failing grades. Any change in a child's behaviour is a "red flag" that there is a problem with that child and that child deserves to have a complete evaluation....a physical and a psychological evaluation. Don't wait for the child "to grow out" these abnormal behaviours, or worse, use physical violence to deal with the problem. These strategies will not help and may actually worsen the situation. All depressed children must be evaluated for their risk to harm themselves. Many persons believe that just mentioning the word suicide will encourage a child to self-harm, this is not so. Parents and godparents I encourage you to have open discussions with your children, whether or not they are depressed, about suicide and appropriate options to deal with the frustrations of daily living.

Your Spiritual health

Last but not least is your spiritual health. The essence of spiritual health is discovering the sense of meaning in your life and finding out and accepting that you are here for a reason and you have a purpose

to fulfil. While prayer, meditation and organized religion are part of the broad definition of spiritual health, the concepts of hope, peace, and belief in God or some supreme being are also part of the equation.

It is well known that one's overall physical health is positively influenced when you are spiritually healthy. Persons with serious medical issues or major life crises are known to cope with their adversities in a more positive manner if their levels of spiritual health are high.

This means that by increasing our levels of spiritual health we can become more adept at handling the stresses and strains of life.

We can improve our spiritual health by

- Being receptive to times of pain or sorrow in our lives (James 1:2 "Consider it pure joy brothers and sisters whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance")**
- We need to avoid being judgmental and**
- Forgive ourselves and others.**
- We need to ensure that we have some quiet time each day to**
- Read and Study the Bible and**
- Pray and meditate.**
- Regular worship is also part of this prescription as well as**
- Laughing at ourselves, Praising God,**
- Being joyful and giving thanks in all situations.**

Exactly fifteen years ago (March 2003) I gave a public lecture on “Wellness, A National Challenge”. At that time my focus was on the challenge of parenting children to enable them to become ‘well’ adults. Much has happened since then.

I’m now officially retired and a card carrying senior citizen. I’ve survived the trials of a divorce, and downsizing and now live in an apartment and garden in four pots. I have changed my place of worship, coming back to this place of peace which nurtured me as an adolescent and young adult. You have become my church family and I thank you for loving me before you even knew me.

I ask myself, have I achieved this state of wellness of which I speak? Do I have the glow of good health and do I radiate that sense of inner peace? I know that my spiritual health is a lot stronger than it was but I still struggle with eating a healthy diet and managing my negative emotions. However, in spite of these challenges I am a bit closer to achieving that goal of wellness that I seek.

You can attain this state of wellness, optimal good health but like everything worth having, it requires effort, perseverance and discipline. Get a check-up with your Family Doctor, start moving, drink water instead, make careful food choices, laugh at yourself and keep on tryingand don’t forget to build up those levels of spiritual health. God loves you. Give it a try!

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