

Health-Illness Continuum

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The health-illness continuum considers care beyond episodic, acute interventions in various health care settings that deal with disease symptoms. Instead, the continuum visualizes wellbeing as ranging from disease symptoms and premature death on the left to growth and high-level wellness to the right, if pictured as a spectrum similar to the wavelengths of light.

Individuals are understood to vary in their overall well-being, where they may be physically healthy at times. In contrast, at other times in their lives, they may suffer from other conditions of the mind (Winemiller, 2013). The concept has revolutionized how healthcare professionals view and understand health since it was first proposed by John Travis more than forty years ago. It allows for a nuanced development of health care intervention models. It complicates health care practice by including aspects of wellbeing that include multidisciplinary efforts. However, understanding the complexity of the human experience means addressing well-being cannot be a simple task.

Health care professionals are tasked with providing holistic care to their patients in various healthcare settings. However, traditional health care can often focus on identifying and addressing physical symptoms of disease and no other aspects of wellbeing. A continuum care health care model recognizes the need to track patients beyond episodic visits to manage symptoms of an illness or disease. As an individual fluctuates from a neutral state of well-being, traditional health care can address any physical symptoms of the disease. At the same time, a more holistic intervention can help address overall health (Penwell-Waines et al., 2018). Approaching health care from this perspective can help reduce the strain on health care resources as individuals are less likely to require continuous care because their overall health needs are being met.

The health-illness continuum visualizes the dynamic state of individuals' well-being and helps to form connections from disease and symptoms to growth and high-level wellness. For example, an individual displaying no signs of physical symptoms may suffer from mental or emotional distress, resulting in mental and physical disease. Research has even shown that cancer can manifest from excessive levels of chronic stress, while poor emotional states can lead to substance abuse and overeating (Winemiller, 2013). Often, individuals turn to these latter behavior patterns to compensate for lack of respect, acknowledgment, and social support, leaving them with no sense of meaning or purpose. The continuum care perspective, therefore, offers opportunities to develop measures that address risks to poor health outcomes rather than just disease symptoms and encourages individuals to participate in their process of well-being throughout their lives (Winemiller, 2013; Wolf, 2017). In addition, healthcare professionals that understand the nuances of the human experience can help advocate for patient care and community wellbeing by engaging in holistic healthcare delivery and advocating for social justice.

Since the health-illness continuum allows for an assessment of mental and physical well-being, it can be used to describe my current state of health. Overall, no factors or issues impede normal physiological functioning, with all my major organ systems assessed regularly. With regular visits to health care professionals, I have overcome certain minor medical problems by following the prescribed medical advice and beginning a journey towards improved wellness. As a proponent of high-level health, I routinely engage in physical activities of weight lifting, walking, and hiking to maintain levels of energy and a healthy circadian rhythm.

Falling towards the right side of the continuum, there are still barriers that influence the day-to-day state of well-being. For example, periods of increased stress can correlate to

disruptions in sleeping patterns which impact overall wellbeing. Also, during weeks of multiple tasks, I can forget to cook healthy meals that disrupt health dietary patterns. But, overall, I remain optimistic about my well-being as I gain more knowledge and implement various healthy lifestyle practices to improve continuously, including better stress management and nutrition.

To continue with my journey towards a higher-level state of wellness, several resources and options are available. An easily accessible resource is nutritional consultations available online and offline in my local community. Also, a plethora of online YouTube channels from certified nutritionists and cooks can help address concerns around preparing healthy meals with limited time and ingredients (Gesser-Edelsburg & Shalayeva, 2017). Developing better habits around nutrition is key for moving further in the right direction on the health-illness continuum.

To achieve a greater level of wellness, it is possible to turn to other forms of physical activity that promote overall well-being. Certain yoga practices and bodyweight calisthenics are excellent resources to incorporate and even replace aspects of my current physical activity routines. Seeking the assistance of experts in these forms of physical activity practices can be done online and offline, with numerous practice guides on the best ways to take advantage of these art forms (Gesser-Edelsburg & Shalayeva, 2017). Developing better sleeping patterns and reducing levels of chronic stress are two important elements of my well-being that are otherwise in a good state but require addressing. Practices of vinyasa flow yoga and mastering bodyweight exercises help develop meditative states of mind and better control over breathing, both key in managing chronic stress levels and delivering better sleeping patterns. As such, including these practices in my life can help me reach a higher level of wellness along the health-illness continuum.

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