

The Importance of *Wellness* in Healthcare



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It makes absolute sense that being healthy and feeling well is an attribute to be sought by everyone. Looking after ourselves is not only a kind and sensible thing to do, but something even greater than that.

When we truly feel well, we greatly enhance our performance. For those of us who work in a healthcare field, that “performance” equates to providing high-quality patient care. We must be seriously invested in enhancing our wellness, as individuals and as a team.

As healthcare professionals, our work demands commitment, diligence, stamina and resilience. We recurrently push our minds and our bodies — and even perhaps our souls — beyond regular limits. At times, we perhaps feel like we thrive in this mindset and environment.

However, for all of us, there will be times where we experience struggle. This struggle may occur anywhere on the spectrum from *mildly inconvenient*

to *devastating*. As healthcare professionals, it is well recognised that we are at greater risk of psychological distress, burnout, and even suicidality, than the general population.¹

Our wellness is important — not just because it is unpleasant to experience “un-wellness,” but because our health influences our work; when we feel unwell, we compromise our performance. It is easy to recall those days when one might have gone to work feeling psychologically stressed, and then struggled not only to care for patients, but also to functionally interact with other members of the healthcare team. Studies have demonstrated that feeling indisposed increases our risk of clinical error and compromises patient safety.²

Furthermore, if one considers the concept of *team wellness*, one may conceptualise a work environment that is “toxic,” where working relationships are continually eroded, resulting in lost productivity and inefficiency, versus one where individual and team wellness are explicitly recognised and supported,

resulting in positive outcomes.³⁻⁵


Based on this premise, the Gold Coast Hospital and Health Service Emergency Department has built the oneED program.⁶⁻⁸ This in-house program comprises a suite of practices, including one approach which employs *mindfulness*. Mindfulness is a simple and neuro-scientifically supported practice, which can be embedded into the midst of a busy clinical shift. The intention is to pause and reset one's mindset in order to enhance self-awareness, but also to practice focussing one's attention in order to enhance *performance*, technical and non-technical.⁹⁻¹¹


By employing some simple practices, we work to regulate our emotions, while optimising our performance. Taking a square breath (inhale for four seconds, hold for four seconds, exhale for four seconds, hold for four seconds) prior to the arrival of a critically unwell patient may allow clear cognitive processes in diagnosis and management. Taking a moment to “reset,” simply by becoming aware of the present moment, enforced to be still while awaiting a blood or urine sample to process, may allow the calming of a heightened state of arousal. Mindfully listening to a patient while minimising interruption allows the patient to feel that they have been heard and allows the healthcare worker to hear how the patient is *feeling* and not just *thinking*.

At team level, we promote connection by engaging in group practice. Weekly handover meetings start with a “four-minute pause” variably consisting of a guided meditation, commentary, or reflection. A cohort of nurses preferred a more active endeavour during this time. Encouraged to explore what seemed to fit better, they started group dancing before shift.

During Emergency Medicine Wellness Week each year since 2019, we have pushed around a Staff Resuscitation Trolley containing healthy snacks to eat while on shift and also had a Reiki Master visit for brief individual sessions. The activity matters — but not as much as the act of engaging collectively in it. Is a team member more comfortable to ask for help from a colleague with whom she was dancing the Macarena an hour ago? I am certain she is.

We are working to ingrain our attitude and our dialogue around wellness into our workplace as an overt and core priority. We wish to cultivate communities that are deeply connected, so no one is isolated in their struggle and everyone is nurtured to reach their aspirations.¹² As a team, we know that this is integral to our end goal of providing excellent patient care.

Embracing our wellness as healthcare workers is not just the kind thing to do — **it is the smart thing to do.** That is why we care about it. 

 Learn more about author Shahina Braganza at ShahinaBraganza.com.

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