

Nine dimensions of veterinary wellbeing

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Abstract

Veterinarians, like all health professionals, are subject to multiple demands and stressors that at times in their careers can compromise satisfaction, engagement, and wellbeing. These stressors include high debt load, long hours, heavy workloads, client demands, navigating social media, and isolation. Our health as professionals can be conceptualized on a continuum, with optimal wellbeing at 1 end and burnout on the other. Veterinarians and the organizations they work within may move at times toward the wellbeing end of continuum, while others may move more towards burnout. Individuals and organizations can play a role in fostering and promoting wellbeing through 9 dimensions: Career, Creative, Emotional, Environmental, Financial, Intellectual, Physical, Social, and Spiritual.

Key words: wellbeing, emotional wellbeing, dimensions of wellbeing

Résumé

Les vétérinaires, comme tous les professionnels de la santé, font face à de nombreuses demandes et à des éléments stressants qui à certains moments de leurs carrières peuvent compromettre la satisfaction, l'implication et le bien-être. Ces éléments stressants incluent la dette élevée, les longues heures, la charge de travail considérable, les demandes des clients, la gestion des médias sociaux et l'isolement. Notre santé en tant que professionnels peut être envisagée comme un continuum allant du bien-être optimal à une extrémité à l'épuisement de l'autre. Les vétérinaires et les organisations pour lesquelles ils travaillent s'orientent parfois vers l'extrémité bien-être du continuum alors que d'autres s'enlignent vers l'extrémité épuisement. Les individus et les organisations peuvent favoriser et promouvoir le bien-être à travers neuf dimensions : Carrière, Créative, Émotionnelle, Environnementale, Financière, Intellectuelle, Physique, Sociale et Spirituelle.

What is Wellbeing?

One wellbeing definition is “when individuals have the psychological, social, and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge.”¹

Wellbeing includes “the presence of positive emotions... the absence of negative emotions...satisfaction with life, and fulfillment and positive functioning.”²

A Wellbeing Framework

Veterinarians, like all health professionals, are subject to multiple demands and stressors that at times in their careers can compromise satisfaction, engagement, and wellbeing. These stressors include high debt load, long hours, heavy workloads, client demands, navigating social media, and isolation. Our health as professionals can be conceptualized on a continuum, with optimal wellbeing at 1 end and burnout on the other. Veterinarians and the organizations they work within may move at times toward the wellbeing end of continuum, while others may move more towards burnout.

Wellbeing stems from an interactive relationship between various dimensions, with no single perfect plan but rather a continuum of useful strategies. Our needs, and the needs of our organization, may change from day to day. An ideal plan is one that can adapt to changing circumstances over time.

The essential skills of being a whole, healthy veterinary professional include intentional integration of the following dimensions:⁵

Career Wellbeing

The “professionally well” veterinarian engages in work to gain personal satisfaction and enrichment consistent with his or her values, goals, and lifestyle.

Creative Wellbeing

The “creatively well” veterinarian values and participates in diverse arts and cultural experiences to appreciate and understand the creative world.

Emotional Wellbeing

The “emotionally well” veterinarian can identify, express, and manage the entire range of feelings and seeks assistance about areas of concern and to promote optimal functioning.

Environmental Wellbeing

The “environmentally well” veterinarian recognizes his or her responsibility to preserve, protect, and improve the environment and appreciates how he or she is interconnected with nature.

Financial Wellbeing

A “financially well” veterinarian is fully aware of his or her personal financial status and budget, saves regularly, and manages his or her finances to achieve realistic goals.

Intellectual Wellbeing

The “intellectually well” veterinarian values lifelong learning and seeks to foster critical thinking, develop moral reasoning, expand worldviews, and engage in education for the pursuit of knowledge.

Physical Wellbeing

The “physically well” veterinarian gets enough sleep (i.e. 7 to 9 hours for both young adults ages 18 to 25 and adults ages 26 to 64⁴); eats a balanced nutritious diet; engages in 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity or 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity and at least 2 strength training sessions per week;³ gets regular medical check-ups; limits intoxication substance use; and practices safe, healthy, sexual relations.

Social Wellbeing

The “socially well” veterinarian has a support network based on interdependence, mutual trust, and respect and has developed sensitivity and awareness of others’ feelings.

Spiritual Wellbeing

The “spiritually well” veterinarian seeks harmony and balance by openly exploring the depth of human purpose and its meaning and finding connection through dialogue and self-reflection.

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