

## EDITORIAL

## SOCIAL INTERDEPENDENCE, WELLNESS, AND MEDICAL STUDENTS

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Wellness is an important aspect integral for the healthier existence of an individual. The concept reflects full integration of states of physical, social, emotional, spiritual, environmental, occupational and mental (intellectual) wellbeing. Each dimension of wellness wheel supports and interacts to enhance the quality of life. A number of studies on wellness of students have documented that social interdependence by means of social communication and social help has an impact on emotional wellbeing which enables an individual to function normally in society and meet the demands of everyday life. People who are in good mental health have the ability to recover effectively from illness, change as well as misfortune. Social wellness helps in acquiring emotional wellbeing by developing and building close friendships and intimacy, practicing empathy and effective listening, caring for others and their common good, and allowing others to care for them. Successful lives can thus be commanded by emotional stability acquired by building close bonds with commitment to compassion and active listening, caring for others, and letting others care for one other.

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Social Wellness (SW) aims at attaining the balance between the different dimensions of wellness by focusing on the interdependency of humans with each other and the surroundings.<sup>1,2</sup> This communication helps to improve support system, which gives strength to the family, reinforces one's ability to work, bestows respect to others and develop meaningful relationship with people. This dimension involves and assesses the ability to remain 'connected' with the community, by developing the ability to listen, care and empathize other individuals.<sup>3</sup> Important domains of SW include positive expression towards community, relationship with known people, and resource wellness for social bounds.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the common saying, 'a friend in need, is a friend indeed' suitably reflects SW, as it also permits one to become a good listener, caring for someone and being cared by others.

Contradictory to SW, social isolation has been documented with health risks magnitude of which is comparable to that of cigarette smoking and obesity.<sup>5</sup> Social isolation has been shown to have a significant impact on the likelihood of experiencing chronic illnesses such as heart disease with increased morbidity and mortality.<sup>6</sup> It has also been shown to be a major factor in a number of mental health issue like depression and Alzheimer's disease.<sup>7</sup> We are quite unfortunate that in contrast to health behaviours such as smoking and obesity, very little is known about social isolation and its effect on health.<sup>8</sup>

The last decade in Pakistan has seen mushrooming growth of predominant medical and dental institutes in Pakistan mostly in the private sector, and unfortunately the majority do not focus on quality, educational environment, infrastructure and qualified faculty.<sup>9</sup> Some students who consider life as 'a bed of

roses' are disappointed when they gain entry into medical profession as they have to face associated academic challenges of medical profession and learn the art of 'Survival of the fittest'. The importance of emotional wellbeing of undergraduate medical students is highlighted from the plethora of difficulties faced by them due to the extensive medical curriculum.<sup>10</sup> To list a few, medical education is deemed to be demanding, different and stressful, entailing numerous lectures, tutorials, laboratory sessions and assignment submissions. Alongside, lack of facilities in hostel, homesickness, high expectations from peers/parents and fear of failure exacerbates the toll faced by students. Concealed beneath all these issues is the stress factor, which piles up, inflicting damage on physical, emotional and mental health presented by digestive symptoms, headaches, sleeplessness, hypertension, anxiety and anger etc.<sup>11</sup> A higher score on emotional competencies has been associated with different indicators of social adaptation, whereas inability to recognise emotions and to use them to facilitate thought was reflected in negative outcomes including drug and alcohol abuse.<sup>12</sup>

The emergent problems have a negative impact on psychology and behaviour of students, which in turn affects their academic performance. The concept of SW enables them to enrich educational environment by peer and group discussions to solve the academic problems. With this, they learn to listen to complaints of patients and exhibit empathy towards them and their worried family members. On the same groundwork, they develop the essence to contribute time and money to the community welfare projects. Attributes of SW thus tend to develop friends-social circle, communication and problem solving skills, group discussions with colleagues, leadership role and

contribution to the community. This will further lead to physical and psychological fitness, self-esteem, harmony with nature, capability to handle stress and a sense of ownership in the community.<sup>13</sup> It is, thus, very important that students should be encouraged to communicate with their friends, batch fellows, seniors, mentors, and family members so that they are able to cope with work stress and make the best of their time in the medical schools. This can be explained by the fact that a sound emotional understanding may involve the ability to listen to tirades by an overworked and a frustrated colleague or trying to be focused on what is best for the patient rather than focusing on 'who is right'.

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