

Bill Hettler, M.D. *John Munson, Ph.D.*
Linda Chapin



Stevens Point, Wisconsin, has been the epicenter of the worksite health promotion field for twenty-six years thanks to the strong support of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, National Wellness Institute, and the efforts of Bill Hettler, M.D., director of health services at the UWSP and co-founder and president of the board of directors of NWI; Linda Chapin, NWI's executive director; and John Munson, Ph.D., head of UWSP's School of Health Promotion and Human Development.



Getting to the Point

The concept of wellness was once synonymous with new-age thinking and not something discussed in corporate boardrooms. Today, that has all changed. In fact, many best-practice health promotion programs embrace the wellness philosophy of nurturing the total person. Instrumental in facilitating this paradigm shift have been the National Wellness Institute and the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. Over the past twenty-six years, these two organizations have been change agents in bringing wellness into the mainstream and serving as the epicenter of the wellness movement. Senior Co-editor George Pfeiffer, M.S.E., FAWHP, discusses the evolution of wellness and its influence with three principals: Linda Chapin, executive director of NWI, Bill Hettler, M.D., co-founder and president of the board of directors of NWI, and John Munson, Ph.D., head of UWSP's School of Health Promotion and Human Development.

George Pfeiffer: What is wellness and how does it differ from health promotion?

Bill Hettler: At UWSP, we often describe wellness as “an awareness of and a movement toward a more positive existence.” With this working definition, we shift from a disease-prevention model toward an advanced state of health—a concept that parallels what Elizabeth Kubler-Ross describes as “an energetic resonance between mind, body, spirit, and emotions.”

John Munson: Health promotion, on the other hand, describes a process of advocating, supporting, providing, and serving people as they seek to reach the epitome of the wellness lifestyle. Each concept serves the other as we

seek to support specific populations and individuals to assume greater self-determination regarding health decisions and achieve advanced levels of positive health. Therefore, the wellness model serves as an integrated framework that allows the health promotion specialist to delve into all aspects of a positive lifestyle.

Pfeiffer: The National Wellness Institute was founded more than twenty-five years ago. What were the primary mission and objectives of NWI at its inception, and have they changed with time?

Linda Chapin: In the mid-1970s, the use of health-hazard appraisals, the concept of prospective medicine, and the wellness work of Halbert Dunn,

John Travis, Robert Allen, Don Ardell, and others formed the beginnings of the wellness movement.

In 1976, the NWI was created out of a perceived need to provide wellness information, services, seminars, and educational opportunities to professionals and the general public who embraced the concept of wellness. Bill Hettler, Fred Leafgren, and Dennis Elsenrath on the Stevens Point campus deserve special recognition for their unwavering emphasis on creating a wellness campus and motivating and supporting others in creating their own wellness communities and experiences.

Munson: NWI's primary mission began with a service emphasis and a sincere desire to facilitate the integration of wellness principles and practices into



everyday life. This mission has changed little over the years and remains strong.

However, the concepts of disease prevention, health promotion cost containment, holistic health, self-responsibility for health, and a growing interest in personal well-being among the masses has allowed NWI to expand its scope and mission.

Hettler: Today NWI finds itself immersed in teaching people how to use media, technology, public policy, and grassroots efforts to create wellness communities in homes and workplaces. More people are interested in the concept of wellness and appreciate its potential for enhancing their own lives and the lives of others around them. NWI now seeks to serve a much larger audience and continues to explore and promote approaches to enhance individual health and well-being.

Pfeiffer: **The National Wellness Conference has been one of the most successful professional meetings in the field of health promotion and wellness. What are the factors in your success?**

Chapin: The National Wellness Conference provides an exceptional learning environment. By basing the program on the six-dimensional model of wellness developed by the founders of NWI, the conference provides opportunities for growth and renewal in all six dimensions—physical, emotional, social, occupational, intellectual, and spiritual.

With the eclectic group of participants that the conference attracts, we create a sense of community and shared vision of wellness. Due to the varied backgrounds and work settings of the participants, those who attend are able to find new ideas, practical skills, and resources to create a seamless environment of wellness at their work, in their communities, and with their families.

The event is more than a conference. It is an integrated experience in wellness.

Pfeiffer: **You're located in a college town and have strong roots in the university system. How have students, faculty, and administration embraced the wellness movement?**

Hettler: When the wellness movement began on our campus twenty-six years ago, society in general was not ready for this new concept. However, our faculty and administrators were forward thinking and quickly grasped the concept and supported creating a campus environment that consistently provided

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ed opportunities for students, staff, and faculty to practice healthy lifestyles. We were quite pleased to discover how quickly our students adopted the wellness model and welcomed the opportunity to live on a campus that reinforced and supported healthy lifestyles.

Munson: UWSP now has seven select areas of curriculum focus and professional development in which the university hopes to excel. We call these mission programs. One of the missions is programs in health promotion and wellness. While all students on campus are required to fulfill a three-credit wellness general-degree requirement, we have remained committed to giving them as many choices as possible. In short, we encourage them to discover and then strengthen the areas in their lives that contribute to their happiness, productivity, and longevity.

Another unique aspect of our philosophy and program is the emphasis that wellness activities are not compart-

mentalized to our health-oriented disciplines. Our entire campus—from our chancellor to other departments—provides activities and support in reinforcing the wellness message. After all, isn't a primary responsibility of a university to provide its students with the opportunity to explore options in living and not just help them make a living? We believe that wellness is a way of life and a choice.

Pfeiffer: **Bill, you have been a leading proponent of learning technologies in spreading the wellness message. What are the advantages and limitations that technology brings to empowering individuals to take greater responsibility for their health and well being?**

Hettler: The Internet has fundamentally changed how people get health information and has had a significant effect on patient-physician decision support. Patients are becoming better informed about treatment options, and, therefore, are becoming more active in the decisions that affect their health and perceived quality and satisfaction.

People can find legitimate sources of information, including interactive assessments, that provide users with tailored risk appraisals and information specific to their risk status and health interests. That's the upside.

But with more than 15,000 health sites on the Internet, trying to weigh credible sources against information and products that have no efficacy and that can, in fact, cause harm, is a serious downside of the e-health revolution.

However, I'm very positive about the power of the Internet and related technologies such as streaming video in connecting people to the right information and support.

Pfeiffer: **John, you and other faculty members at UWSP have developed a nationally respected curriculum for preparing students to work within the wellness community. What differentiates your program?**



Munson: As strong believers in the concept that success isn't accidental, our faculty takes it upon themselves to model wellness principles and practices from the beginning of students' careers. Students in the health promotion major at UWSP become part of a family immediately upon entering our program.

Over the years, we hired specific faculty to play roles that we have predetermined. In the first five weeks of their college experience, we make sure they have an adviser, invite them to be part of our student professional club—we require they attend meetings as part of class assignments—and start treating them as budding professionals. We immediately teach them to talk the talk and walk the walk.

Very shortly afterward, we immerse them in our multidimensional wellness teaching model, and begin the process of convincing them that being cross-trained in multiple disciplines will lead them to many opportunities to enter the health promotion profession.

For example, we've built a number of specialized courses that make our program unique and provide our students with backgrounds not normally found in undergraduate programs. We have required courses in health-behavior change, health-promotion marketing, epidemiology, technology in health promotion, and spiritual wellness.

In the mid-1970s, we made the decision that we were going to become one of the top undergraduate programs in the nation. We have consistently undertaken steps to revise and update our curriculum to meet the needs of employers across many health professions. When new opportunities are identified, we move quickly to implement new curriculum, and we are not afraid to throw out the old stuff even if it seems to be working. We strive to stay on the cutting edge and give our students unique packages with which to market themselves.

For instance, our safety-and-health-protection minor was a result of writing a grant that allowed us to integrate

concepts of occupational health and safety into our major, and, at the same time, train 30 percent of our students in a new area. Certificate programs in safety and health protection have recently been created, and we are moving into a variety of new course areas in alternative health. We see the world as our market and encourage our students to see themselves as leaders in many health-related disciplines.

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Pfeiffer: Linda, as executive director of NWI, do you see an opportunity for similar organizations to work together on common issues, and if so, what is the most pressing issue?

Chapin: I see tremendous opportunity for all organizations involved in wellness and health promotion to work together to provide a shared vision of health. By working through a cooperative model, rather than a competitive model, we can reinforce positive lifestyles.

Technology has created a dichotomous situation in our society. On one hand, we have tremendous opportunity to access information and communicate with others all over the world. On the other hand, it has created more isolation from human interaction. This, coupled with the extreme busyness in our lives, has created a sense of disconnection. By creating opportunities

for individuals to reconnect with what is meaningful in their lives, we can provide opportunities for growth and behavior change toward a more healthy existence.

Facts and statistics provide awareness of the health and socioeconomic problems our society faces. But we must be careful not to remain so focused on the measuring and reporting of illness and disease, and ignore the viable solutions that exist today to engage individuals and communities in taking a greater role in life decisions. To that end, I believe the wellness community can be a significant change agent in social and health empowerment.

As we work together, we need to capitalize on the strengths of each organization. Some excel in research and evaluation that promote efficacy. Others provide excellent tools and resources for program implementation and design. Still others promote supportive environments to sustain healthy lifestyles. Yet another group provides professional development and skills to facilitate behavior change.

The one part that seems most lacking among all of our organizations is an integrative approach that uses the media not only to raise awareness regarding the health-related problems facing our society, but also key approaches that exist in mediating these serious health and lifestyle issues.

In my opinion, the most critical issue we face as a society is to find meaning and connection in our lives. Parallel to this are societal issues that have deep ramifications to the overall health of our society such as access to affordable, universal health care; parity of resources for mental health; providing true rehabilitation rather than punishment within the penal system; and programs that encourage us to value and respect diversity.

