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Quality of Life

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More and more quality of life is judged in terms of wealth rather than in terms of such immeasurable faculties such as happiness, creativity, well being, generosity of spirit and a sense of compassion and connectedness. Even the education system is focused on the needs of big business and children are narrowly focused on aims which do not enhance their health or create a wider knowledge of their understanding of their place in society or the nature of life itself. The basic needs of freedom of poverty expressed by such people as Galtung, Rawls, Max-Neef and Lasswell and Maslow are not addressed for people even in higher socio-economic groups in the developed world. Such needs would address the needs specifically for affection, understanding, participation, leisure, creation, identity and freedom. The society is so stressed that by 2010, one in three people will be suffering from depression which psychiatrists consider needs medical treatment by drugs. So we come to the brave new world of Aldous Huxley where the workers are placed on soma to blunt their conception of what freedom or real quality of life is.

Poverty and Culture

According to the UN Development Report, Australia is second only to Norway as the most desirable country in the world in which to live. This report of the UN Development program measures 162 countries according to a range of factors such as life expectancy, education levels, healthcare and income.

However, in this picture there is obviously no room for

complacency. According to research by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, University of Canberra for the Smith Family welfare organisation in 1999, 1 in 7 Australians were living in poverty.

Those most likely to live in poverty were those on welfare, those with three or more children, sole parents or the unemployed. The researchers warned that the risk of poverty is greater for children than adults. NATSEM estimated that 752,000 dependant Australians or 14.9% lived in poverty in May 1999. Also, 12.9% of Australian adults lived in poverty in May 1999.

Some of the things that cannot be measured by statistics is the concept of culture. Culture is also dependent on quality of life and quality of life is also dependent on health as well as education.

The Key To Culture

Often, the key to culture is found, not so much primarily in the early experience of the child. It is dependent on pre-natal items as to the kind of nutrition the mother has, the kind of experience she has experienced during her pregnancy, the kind of relationships she has, whether it is integral and stable or unharmonious. After birth, the forms of child rearing, social stimulation, love and care are very much significant as to the future child's happiness.

Our children are currently being born into a world which is threatened by many, many factors, including those with

adverse effects. The factors the global community has to deal with in the next hundred years are famine, global spread of disease, civil war, international wars, competition for scarce resources, civil disorder amongst the haves and have nots, housing shortages, and the highly materialistic ethos of the possibility of human extinction.

Human beings have already changed the environment of the planet radically and have caused many other bio-extinctions of other species. If current trends continue the picture will get worse. The projected extra six billion people in the next hundred years, predicted for 2020 would need more room to live and grow food. If there are more of us, there is less room for plants and animals. There is less room for the tropical rainforests and the planetary biodiversity of species.

Human beings are causing extinctions at 100-10,000 times the natural rate. This is the greatest way of extinction since the end of the cretaceous period 65 million years ago when the dinosaurs were annihilated.

Yet, politicians generally do not think in terms of large periods of time or even the next generation. Perhaps the maximum term they can think of is three years which maybe the tenure of their political term or contract.

The Economics of Happiness

This split between the more rational, the logical and the creative approaches to economics is expressed also in the way quality of life has been measured up until now. In his 1974 paper, the Economic Historian, Richard Easterlin formulated what was later known as the Easterlin Paradox. Basically above a very low level, economic growth does not seem to improve human welfare. Later evidence confirms his observation, Americans were no more likely to describe themselves as happy in the 1990's than they had been in the 1940's.

Economist, Andrew Oswald at Waricks University, England in his paper, 'Happiness and Economic Performance', April 1997, stated that industrialised well-being appears to rise as national income grows but the rise is so small it is sometime undetectable and employment however, seems to be a large source of unhappiness.

This suggests that governments ought to be trying to reduce the amount of joblessness in the economy. In a country that is already rich, policy aimed instead at raising economic growth may be of comparatively little value.

In his most recent paper, Oswald was studying whether money makes people happy. It showed that people who won lottery money or received an inheritance had a high-

er mental well being in the following year. A windfall of 50,000 pounds, was associated with a rise in well-being of 0.1 and 0.3 standard deviations. He ended by saying whether these happiness gains wear off over time remains a good question.

It is interesting to see that the kind of parameters he was using was dependent on the British Household Panel Survey which consists of questions which could just as easily be asked by a GP on his patients if the GP wanted to find out whether they were depressed or not.

They were also based on stress reactions and did not seem to be measuring basic personality types, cultural acquisition, creativity, levels of actualisation, educational attainment and other things.

Quality of Life and Culture

One thing we can say is that culture alters quality of life and that that individual quality of life is enhanced by a person's ability to be educated and be brought up in a warm, caring environment.

Within this context of mind and matter there are several papers which are of interest. First it has been shown that the intellectual or emotional development of children from the age five to the completion of high school is adversely affected by lack of social capital. The social capital refers to unfavourable environments which basically do not give care or support. The effect was specifically noted in socio-economic deprived families, Quote Pediatrics Volume 101 1998, Children who Prosper in Unfavourable Environments, the Relationship to Social Capital.

Another study has found that dementia occurs at a much higher rate amongst people with learning disabilities than it does amongst the general population. This is independent of the association between dementia and Downs Syndrome.

A further study examined the perception of parental caring obtained by undergraduates relating to subsequent health over an ensuing thirty-five years.

This was done on Harvard undergraduate men who participated in the Harvard mastery stress study and the results show that subjects identified in mid life as suffering from the common degenerative diseases of Western society gave their parents significantly lower ratings as perceived in terms of "parental care, loving and just and share, hardworking, and clever," whilst in college.

It is obvious that intellectual stimulation and loving, caring support from family, friends, and the community at

large is extremely important for the general well-being of the individual as well as for the prevention of intellectual deficit later in life.

Globalisation

Globalisation on the free trade model of the neo-liberal Washington consensus economics is colliding with local cultures natural economic sovereignty, social customs and values, as well as traditional agriculture, indigenous rights and the protection of biodiversity and the environment. The fundamental issue is the very economic model underlying today's Globalisation of technology, trades and markets. The critics from many diverse perspectives agree that free trade doesn't account for social and environmental costs and cultural disruption in the price in traded goods and services will continue to cause more harm than good.

The World Bank, the IMF, the US Government and the WTO still refuse to recalculate prices and microeconomic indicators including the GDP to include these social and environmental costs, which contribute towards the deterioration of human life. Civil society movement groups throughout the world are committed to the idea of preserving human identity and enriching biological and cultural diversity.

Power of the Human Mind

Complex technologies have tremendous potential for harm. The most under used resource on the planet is the human mind. Although we may have finite resources, we have one infinite resource which is the human mind and this faculty is the least understood aspect of humanity on the planet, and should encompass the term bio-mind which means the complete or self actualised human being.

Healing the Stressed Society

This has particular significance in terms of the pre-eminence healing as an impact on creating a more successful, dynamic and sustainable society, particularly in the Australian nation. If people can understand the intimate connection between the mind and body they could then realise how the power in each of us has the ability to affect not only how we feel, but indeed how to affect the course and outcome of illnesses.

Only recently in all medical schools in the Western world, the connection between mind and body, that was the cornerstone of Hippocratic medicine, was ignored. It was

in the 1930's that Cannon discovered the bodily fight and flight syndrome, a reaction to any perceived threat by a living organism. Subsequently Canadian, Hans Selye defined stress as the non-specific response of the body to any demand. In the 1970's researchers began to understand the flight and fight and stress responses were related to a variety of human disease states and more recently with the work of George Solomon, Stanford University, Robert Aider, University of Rochester and Candice Pert at John Hopkins, a new field has been mapped called psychoneuroimmunology emphasizing the interconnection between the mind, brain and the immune system.

George Engel a Professor of Medicine at the University of Rochester, has studied hundreds of patients with chronic disease over a period of twenty years. He found that 70-80% of these people who had suffered from heart attacks, cancer, stomach ulcers, ulcerative colitis, multiple sclerosis, and other conditions had all experienced extended periods of helplessness and times when they felt like giving up.

The vulnerability of the human being is found even at the earliest age. Tiffany Field, and her colleagues at the University of Milan Research Institute showed that premature infants who were massaged several times a day for ten minutes demonstrated a 47% weight gain and were able to leave the hospital six days earlier than other premature babies who received only the customary hospital care. This saved the hospital costs of \$10,000 per baby per day.

The Control and Moderation of Stress

In quality of life assessment therefore we have to understand that control and moderation of stress is a prerequisite for people who wish to live long fulfilling lives.

On top of this, what quality of life surveys have not addressed is happiness and health. Happiness is not even touched in quality of life assessments. A reference can be made to the poverty outline discussed in the World Banks dissertation and research on poverty. It is interesting to see that in the context of physiological change, humanity has barely moved out of bodily integrity.

Self Actualisation

The primitive physiological drives for survival for flight and fight and hunger are the basic *modus vivendi* for most of humanity. What we need to emphasise and encourage in the creation of culture are the dynamic needs that Maslow so aptly describes in his dynamic hierarchy, which are safety needs, belongingness and love, esteem and self actualisation. Our current culture is a rapacious

assault on peoples senses of a belief system of success at all costs, competition, exploitation of people and environment.

Healing above all else in terms of mind/body medicine is the key to creating a culture that is more sustainable and vital. A nation that is actively involved in its own healing and thereby creating a unique culture is more able to satisfy and enhance its creative needs.

Such a nation would be able to set an example to the rest of the world in terms of its creative performance and economic success. The ingredient is the development of a culture which is based on physiological happiness which then becomes the determinant for actual self actualisation both in terms of the individual and also in terms of society. This reduction of stress will also save billions of dollars in terms of the prevention of cardiovascular disease, cancer and other degenerative diseases of western society.

The Healed and Creative Nation

From this point of view, the healer comes into focus as being a significant player in the building of a knowledge and creative nation. In this aspect everyone who comes to see a physician could be helped to understand, the emotional, environmental, work and social stresses that contribute to their illness. They could be advised about proper nutrition, exercise and taught relaxation techniques, self hypnosis and other appropriate strategies for self awareness, self regulation and self actualisation.

Kofi Annan has recently talked about the ecological print of unsustainability that humankind currently has on this planet. The population is currently at 6,169,232,000, and increases at about 438 every ten minutes. "Humanity must solve a complex equation". Annan said. "We must stabilise our numbers, but equally importantly we must stabilise over use of resources and ensure sustainable development for all."

There are certain fundamental factors that need to be understood in healing. These are:

1. The control of stress
2. Nutrition
3. Mastery of life, and control of destiny
4. Support of the community

These four factors are essential for the health and well being of the individual in society.

Mastery of life also includes: challenge, participation, commitment and control. It has been found particularly that when people are challenged, whether they are small children or adults, they rise to the occasion much more effectively if they are not spoon fed.

A sense of involvement and participation in the community is another form of healing as it empowers the individual. This is one of the ideologies underlying the creation of development and parental centres for children, in which children and parents work together in a process, which enables them to create unified families and a productive and positive future.

The dominance of the market system has meant that the GNP does not include environmental costs and benefits, or social indicators. A new economics of sustainability should include such social indicators as literacy, education, women's rights, crime, suicide health and illness. The GNP does not reflect the way people feel about themselves, or society. In this respect, we need a new index, which encompasses quality of life and wellbeing for a nation in rapid transition and renaissance.

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