



WELLNESS™
REVOLUTION

Let's Spark a Wellness Revolution!

Join us throughout this year
to build your resilience capacity

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Our Challenge

The veterinary profession has received a lot of bad news and frightening press in the past few years regarding its mental health. Studies suggest mental well-being eludes a third to a half of those in the field,¹ which constitutes a public health crisis. When undiscussed and unheeded, these dire statistics can set in motion a continuing cycle of apprehension and despair because most people feel helpless when they approach such problems globally.

We *can* make a different choice. We can calmly step back and consider this issue like any other chronic health issue in our own patients. What life changes can we, as individuals and teams, foster in ourselves to create more positive outcomes?

First, how did we get here? What is it about our profession—one most people enter with great enthusiasm and passion—that wears us down? The jury is still out, but many elements of veterinary medicine appear to contribute to a decline in personal well-being.

Veterinary training is difficult, tedious, and expensive. Veterinarians feel great pressure to run healthy small businesses and function as medical gurus, superb communicators, and strong leaders, all in the midst of long days filled with sick pets, euthanasia, disgruntled clients, and few breaks. Veterinary nurses and other team members face similar challenges as they



support veterinarians, clients, and patients day after day. Although a veterinary career has many rewards, the benefits sometimes get lost in tsunamis of stress that drown all attempts at balance.

How can we turn this tide? Fortunately, veterinary leaders and mental health practitioners have made improving the profession's well-being a high priority. At the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges' fourth annual Veterinary Wellness Summit in November 2016, counselors, social workers, college deans, and industry leaders explored ways to improve the profession's current negative realities.

Personal Action

This is great news, but we cannot wait for more research or new national programs *before* taking action—the time to focus on personal well-being is now! Although we cannot immediately correct all the concerns that contribute to stress, burnout, and the deterioration of mental health that plague the profession, we can begin to incrementally take stock of where we sit in life and launch a *personal* walk toward wellness. We are our own bosses!

Over the next 12 months, *Veterinary*

Team Brief will explore reliable, practical ideas you can integrate into daily life to minimize and combat your potential for burnout and stress overload. We will also present online interviews with veterinary professionals who have successfully created novel ways of relating to their jobs and careers. *Veterinary Team Brief* wants to partner with you to spark a **Wellness Revolution** throughout our profession, starting with you!

Wellness Defined

The World Health Organization defines mental health as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.² This definition gives obvious clues about how to live a life of wellness. Realizing potential, coping with stresses, and working with commitment and joy combine to turn struggles into successes and surviving into thriving.

Here are ways you can start:

- **Explore Individual Diagnostics**
The first step is to examine what you currently do well and where you may want to improve thought or action habits that lead to negative feelings and moods. Although not a scientific instrument, the Self-Care Checklist provides a robust assessment of how you currently live. (See **Self-Care Checklist**, page 19.) Complete the checklist and use the results to list your current strengths and weaknesses.
- **Take Action**
Your list should be specific. Where do you need to improve? How about asking for help or delegating

TAKE ACTION

- 1 Complete the Self-Care Checklist.
- 2 Write down your strengths and limitations so you see them daily.
- 3 Commit to focused action to strengthen self-care strategies each morning.
- 4 Celebrate your victories each evening after work.
- 5 Reflect on your progress each week.

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at work, rather than going it alone? Are you the perpetual *Yes* person who needs to incorporate *No* into your vocabulary? Do you doubt or ignore your success or talent?

Celebrate your gifts for 5 minutes each day. Commit to taking incremental steps daily to improve these limitations. You owe it to yourself to alter habits that thwart building the life you deserve.

- What strengths did you discover when you completed the Self-Care Checklist? Do you allow yourself to play, exercise, and eat well? Pursue these activities more often.
- Do you ask for what you need? Revel in that.
- Do you take time for yourself and refute the pressure to be perfect? Rejoice in this success.

These elements support your well-being foundation. Practice them, build on them, and experiment with incorporating positive

habits into your daily routine. Also, write them down to remind yourself of your commitments. Writing infuses them with power. Wrestle with them, stretch them, and challenge yourself with them. Just like going to the gym daily, make a habit of integrating these commitments into your life.

A Powerful Beginning

The power to reshape your career, your stress level, and your life depends on taking your first step. Then another, and another. Although veterinary careers can be full of stress, sorrow, and trials, never forget that veterinary medicine is a noble profession that provides purpose, passion, and great personal satisfaction. Both sides of this coin can coexist. *Veterinary Team Brief* invites you to spend 2017 focusing on the side of the coin that offers hope and personal progress.

Take this step for yourself. We will keep nudging the profession to catch up with you! ■■■

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References

1. Larkin M. Studies confirm poor well-being in veterinary professionals, students. *JAVMANews*. <https://www.avma.org/news/JAVMANews/pages/160501c.aspx>. Published April 13, 2016. Accessed November 15, 2016.
2. Mental health: a state of being. World Health Organization. http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en. Updated August 2014. Accessed November 2016.



KATHLEEN RUBY, PhD, has been the director of counseling and wellness and a faculty member at Washington State University College of Veterinary Medicine for the past 18 years.

She was the cofounder of the Veterinary Leadership Experience, an experiential retreat geared toward building personal leadership skills and a wellness mindset for veterinary students and practitioners. Additionally, she was the founding editor in chief for *Exceptional Veterinary Team* and *Veterinary Team Brief*. Kathy is a member of the AVMA Wellness Task Force and has helped launch a professional group for veterinary mental health practitioners. She speaks and writes about wellness and well-being issues throughout the profession. She is also a member of the *Veterinary Team Brief* advisory board.

FUN FACT: Kathy recently returned from an 18-month sabbatical in New Zealand, which had been on her wellness bucket list for 2 decades. She especially recommends long beach walks and flat whites as prime soul-quenchers.



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Self-Care Checklist

Do You?

- Overspend, overeat, and overindulge
- Expect others to read your mind and meet your needs
- Withhold success from yourself
- Ignore your deepest desires but seek to fulfill the desires of others
- Ignore your real emotions and put on a happy face
- Push yourself beyond reasonable limits
- Allow others to emotionally or physically abuse you
- Deflect compliments
- Say Yes because you cannot say No
- Avoid time alone
- Overextend yourself because of your need to feel important, needed, or worthy
- Fear emotional intimacy
- Never ask for help and try to do everything yourself
- Try to appear perfect

or Do You?

- Take time for yourself
- Allow yourself to make mistakes and to be open about your weaknesses
- Ask for your needs to be met from a place of vulnerability
- Spend time with friends
- Rest
- Play
- Exercise
- Eat well
- Spend money wisely
- Pursue your dreams
- Enjoy and make time to enjoy and be intimate with those you love
- Forgive
- Allow others to be disappointed in you
- Appropriately express emotions, including anger and sadness
- Tell others what they mean to you
- Be present for your family
- Receive love from others
- Say Yes and No
- Create a powerful support system for yourself
- Celebrate accomplishments big and small

Source

The 8 key components of personal wellness. Befriending Your Body. <http://befriendingyourbody.com/the-8-key-components-of-personal-wellness>. Updated 2012. Accessed 2016.

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Download a printable checklist at brief.vet/wellness-checklist