

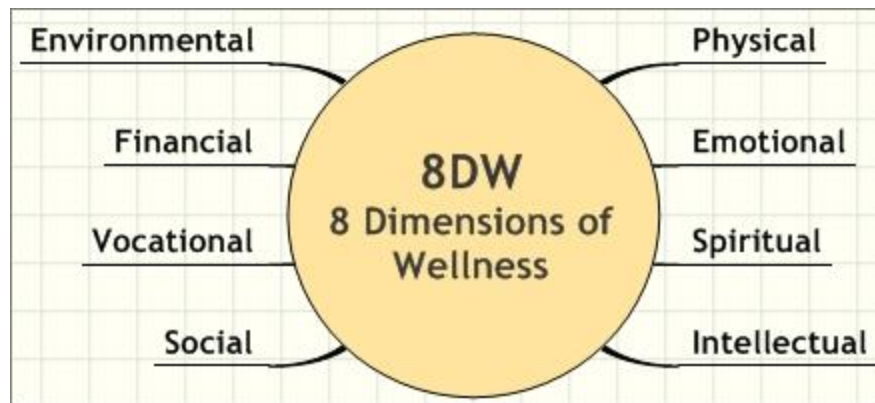


EIGHT DIMENSIONS OF WELLNESS (8DW) IN CONTINUING CARE RETIREMENT COMMUNITIES BY JEFF HOUSE

Many writers have discussed six dimensions of wellness: *Physical, Emotional, Spiritual, Intellectual, Social and Vocational*. To that general list, for Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRCs) a *Financial dimension* should be added for three reasons:

- Finances are the enabler of almost every other benefit the community could offer;
- Prospects and residents tend to be hyper-concerned about finances and may exclude themselves from residency for financial reasons; and
- The wellness of the community cannot be understood without understanding its financial condition.

And, since CCRCs cannot exist in isolation, the *Environmental dimension* refers to the connection between the individual resident and the rest of the CCRC and between the CCRC and the wider world.



First, some vocabulary: the abbreviation “8DW” refers to the concept and process characteristics. Thus, 8DW is one thing, not eight. “Eight dimensions” refers to the detailed subject matter. 8DW is macro; eight dimensions are micro.

A quick scan of the literature indicates that most writers regard the six (or seven or eight) dimensions of wellness as current diagnostic categories: How’s your blood pressure today? How are you feeling today? That use is appropriate in certain contexts, particularly within the traditionally narrowly defined notion of personal wellness, but limiting the use just to the moment misses much of the wholeness inherent in the concept.

8DW is a highly scalable concept that can be applied to an activity, a program, or a community; to a feature or a facility; to an individual or a group. It can be applied to the status quo, to goals for the future, and to the implementation plans to bridge that gap.



8DW can be a creative tool. Build the mission and vision statements around the eight dimensions: identify one dimension and develop a program that will improve it, or pick a program or feature and find ways to improve it so that it contributes to additional dimensions of wellness.

8DW offers the capability to be interpretive. Studying an aspect of CCRC life from all of the eight dimensions should yield a more robust, versatile and integrated understanding of that aspect. The community can be explained to a resident, regulator or board member more effectively because at least one of the eight dimensions is likely to resonate with almost anyone.

Most people believe that marketing materials are most effective when they address the benefits that customers can enjoy rather than the features that are built in. However, most marketing people find it very difficult to describe benefits to others. Features are objective, but benefits, like beauty, are in the eye of the beholder. Addressing benefits effectively requires knowing the goals and concerns that are important to a particular customer. Nothing will replace a personal relationship to gain that knowledge, but the rubric of 8DW improves our ability to say something that will appeal to as many people as possible.

8DW could serve as an audit tool. Developing and operating a CCRC is incredibly expensive. Every component has to pull its own weight and has to add value. In the context of this discussion, every component should contribute to each of the eight dimensions. Certain components are absolutely essential (kitchen, waste management, etc.), but when the time comes to choose between elective components or how to provide those components, 8DW could be a useful tool, particularly if it serves as a shared communications framework between parties with competing agendas.

8DW could serve as a market research tool. Questions posed in surveys, focus groups and interviews could be designed to relate to the eight dimensions. Resident (and even staff) satisfaction surveys could similarly probe all eight dimensions. The presence of common threads would improve the ability to relate market research to resident satisfaction. Quality assurance activities could be organized under 8DW. Perhaps competitors could be compared according to the eight dimensions.

A characteristic that distinguishes CCRCs from almost any other business is the implicit (and often explicit) statement that life will be better as a CCRC resident. Making that claim obligates the operator to a holistic approach. To assess how well that obligation is being met, a sponsor would need to look at all eight dimensions. Hence, 8DW could serve as a communication and evaluation tool for the management and governance of the community.

Investment bankers often refer to the tax-exempt bonds for CCRCs as “story bonds” - they are easiest to sell when there is a compelling story. The seniors who are interested in CCRCs are typically intelligent people who make thoughtful decisions and expect the same from the communities they consider. The entire story about a CCRC, especially in highly competitive markets, has to make sense. It must be appealing, relevant, coherent and believable. 8DW could serve as the cognitive framework that promotes rational development and pulls everything together in ways that can be informative, and more importantly, persuasive to both internal and external audiences.