

Balancing the wheels of life

How to ride through life more smoothly

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Have you ever ridden a bicycle with a wobbly wheel? The ride isn't smooth, and you notice every bump in the road. As you focus on your discomfort, you may be distracted from the beautiful vistas you're riding past.

Think of the bicycle as your overall health, which carries you through life. For most of us, learning how to ride a bike begins in childhood as we learn to control the wheels. But with more wear and tear on the bike, the once-pleasant ride becomes uncomfortable and sometimes out of balance.

As clinicians, we need not just to practice riding our own bicycles gracefully, but also to care for our patients' worn and hurt bikes. Only by being balanced yourself can you truly help another.

Living a balanced, healthy life means finding joy in the journey. Unfortunately, our mortal existence comes with bumps in the road. In our fast-paced society that requires us to juggle family, professional, and other demands, many of us seem compelled to ride faster. But this may not be effective or productive—and it can lead to distress.

The wheel as metaphor

One way to find a balance is to examine the wheels that carry you through life. Each wheel has many spokes; think of the



section within each spoke as one of the areas of life that together make up your whole well-being. One section represents your physical health and the others your spiritual, mental, social, environmental, financial, recreational, and emotional health.

Now imagine the center of each spoke is a zero and the outer rim is a 10; from the center to the rim, the numbers increase. How would you rank yourself in each area of life, with 0 representing the lowest ranking and 10 the highest? Put a dot on the number that represents how strong you think you are in each area of your life. Giving each section a numeric value helps you identify problems so you can move toward a plan for improvement. For most people, the numbers will vary from section to section, because most of us feel stronger in some areas of life than in others.

Next, connect the dots around your wheel to see how bumpy the wheel is. If you assigned a 4 to some parts of your life but gave others a 2 or an 8, the connected dots would create an irregular wheel. When you look at your wheel as a whole, you're examining how bumpy or out of balance

your life may be. With this wheel, would your ride through life be smooth or bumpy? Using this tool can help you identify why your ride seems out of balance and can pinpoint which areas need improvement.

Using SOAP to clean your bike

Clinicians often use the acronyms SOAP and SOAPIER to guide the nursing or patient care process.

- **S**O stands for subjective and objective data—the process of collecting important information about a potential or real problem.
- **A** stands for assessment, the second step. Being able to label a problem helps you recognize the reality of your situation.
- With that information, you can create a plan, represented by **P**, to address the problem.
- The additional steps of intervention, evaluation, and reevaluation (the IER of SOAPIER) can guide you through the cyclic nature of the process.

Improving the numbers on your wheel

Similarly, we can keep ourselves in balance by using the patient care process on our wheels—and by extension, ourselves. During the assessment step, examine the ratings you gave to each wheel section to gauge the status of each area of your life. Then ask yourself the following questions:

- What would it take for me to move from a 4 to a 5, or from a 6 to a 7, in this area?
- What one action could I take today to improve this rating?
- Am I willing to do this?
- What are the barriers to improving my rating in this area?
- What resources do I have or need to have to improve the rating in this area?

Joy in the journey

By using the SOAP process on your own wheels that carry you through life, you can make your ride less jarring. When we're in balance, our ride through life is much smoother and we can enjoy the journey more. When you're balanced and stable, you can run aside the wobbly bikes of struggling patients—and use the bicycle analogy to help them identify imbalances in their own health and lives.

Holistic practice helps individuals find meaning and balance in their lives. Health is more than just absence of disease. It refers to our emotional, physical, spiritual, social, and environmental well-being. A problem in any one area can affect the whole.

Striving for balance in life is a constant challenge. The terrain changes with the seasons and demands of life. Sometimes just keeping perspective on the road ahead helps you realize that despite the hills and valleys, your wheels are in balance and you just need to keep pedaling. By applying the patient care process to ourselves, we can adjust our wheels and better enjoy the ride. Savor the journey. ■

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