

Wellness: For Our Communities, For Ourselves

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The press release about the Trejo Foster Foundation Institute that was distributed by the American Library Association (ALA) included this sentence: “Millions of Hispanics and Latinos rely on libraries for access to essential information,” said President-Elect Roy. “I want to share with this audience the resources the ALA and libraries offer to help Hispanic and Latino communities develop the skills they need to live, learn and thrive in an information society.”

Over these two days, our community of interest is doing this: we are sharing the resources that libraries and our organizations, including ALA, have to help our communities achieve buena salud, good health.

We are learning about resources such as PubMed and MedlinePlus, contemplating issues such as the impact of Hispanic culture on health and community-based health efforts, and acknowledging the existence of health disparities.

We are learning about the efforts of our good partners in providing communities with health information: partners that include the Arizona Health Sciences Library, the U.S./Mexico Border Health Commissioner, Campesinos Sin Fronteras, the Tucson Pima Public Library, the Arizona Cancer Center, the Pima County Health Department, the National Library of Medicine’s National Network of Libraries of Medicine, Sunnyside and Elvira Advocates for Health, the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, and the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio.

The press release says that I will share news about resources that libraries and ALA are offering in the area of health. What resources do ALA and libraries have to offer Hispanic and Latino communities that might help them in their search for starting their path toward or maintaining buena salud?

1. Collections: we provide authoritative resources in various formats from print to electronic. We have a statewide database service in Texas that is part of the TexShare program.

Included in this year’s suite of databases are nine databases that focus on health: Alt Health Watch, Consumer Health Complete, Health Source: Consumer Edition, Health Source: Nursing/Academic, MedicLatina, MEDLINE, Natural & Alternative Treatments, Health & Wellness Resource Center with Alternative Health Module, and Health Reference Center Academic. As librarians know, these commercial resources are not the sort of sources that are located through a Google search.

2. Librarians help the public develop information literacy skills. We help the public acquire the skills to locate and evaluate information.
3. Librarians also develop programs on health for the public, including health fairs.
4. Librarians work together to continue to acquire skills. Librarians are the models of lifelong learners.

Programs at the recent ALA conference included:

- “Aging and Activism: Findings from the Latest Research on Brain Health and Psychology”
- “Aging Issues for GLBT Patrons”
- “Serving Spanish Speakers with Disabilities”
- “Got Deaf Culture@Your Library?”
- “Addressing the Information Needs of Female-to-Male Transsexuals (FTMs)”

Buena salud. In Native circles we call this wellness. What words do we have for wellness that help us describe what good health means for indigenous peoples? Balance, wholeness, healing, surviving, thriving, well-being, restoring, resilience, mending.

Why am I interested in wellness? I am interested in wellness due to my cultural history, my work history, and my family history.

My interest in wellness comes from the cultural practices and cultural behaviors of my tribal community, the Anishinabe, the Spontaneous People. In Anishinabe culture, the bear clan were keepers of justice and also medicine people. Anishinabe, also called Ojibwe, learned how to use natural materials to treat and cure illnesses. They learned how to do this by observing the lives of the earth’s creatures.

Peacock and Wasuri relate an example of how the people did this:

Years ago, a grandmother and granddaughter went gathering blueberries. The grandmother saw a snake following a frog. The frog, sensing the snake, jumped into a clutch of poison ivy. The snake waited, then moved on. The frog jumped out of the poison ivy patch, rolled in jewel weed, and then also moved on. This is how the Ojibwe people learned how to treat skin rash from poison ivy with jewel weed.[1]

Native people observed healthy traditional lifeways. The traditional Anishinabe diet included lean protein sources (venison, fish), wild rice, and berries. Now we know that blueberries are rich with antioxidants and that strawberries, the fruit we called heart

berries, are indeed good for the heart. In traditional Anishinabe life, spirituality was tied to knowing medicinal ways. Members of the Midewiwin or Grand Medicine Lodge were healers. Many traditional health approaches have found their ways into our medicine cabinets. [2] Sport and physical games were part of the culture and companion activities in the search for the true path of life. These days, what do you see when you visit indigenous sovereign lands? You see dialysis centers and juvenile detention facilities. Tribal communities acknowledge that wellness is tied to self esteem. Tribal communities are involved in recovering their health.

I am interested in wellness because of my workplace past. I lived an earlier life in Arizona—four years in Yuma and one year in Tucson. Half of my life in Yuma involved working in the community hospital as a medical radiologic technologist, an X-ray tech. X-ray techs are now called medical imagers. X-ray techs are part of diagnostic teams, assisting physicians in making diagnoses, uncovering the puzzles of the body. X-ray techs are magicians: they assess each person's body type, maneuver equipment over, under, and around them, and then capture images that help speak the body's condition to the world. X-ray techs help capture stories. They tell the stories of broken bones, of emphysema, of gall stones, of ulcers, or of horse-shoe kidneys. I am interested in wellness because it tells the story of our inevitabilities.

I am interested in wellness because of my family history. Defining family is a lifelong sifting out of what denotes culture, biography, autobiography, memory. How is family tied to wellness? How is culture tied to wellness? How are our *cuerpos*, our bodies, tied to family history?

It is not indigenous to be overweight, though I am. It is not indigenous to have trouble with alcohol or drugs, but my family has. It is not indigenous to have diabetes, though I have had this sugar disease and so has my family, and we lost a grandfather to this illness. It is not indigenous to have glaucoma, or chronic ear infections, or allergies: these, too, are the stories of my family. And indigenous people face higher than average incidence of cancer, a disease that took a grandmother, three aunts, and a first cousin at the age of 30.

I am concerned also about the health of our library workers. This year a Task Force is helping explore workplace wellness (WWTF). They are gathering resources and developing some programs to help all of us discover or rediscover wellness. Here is a preview of some of our plans.

1. We are developing a content-rich Workplace Wellness website. Cassandra Gallegos, graduate student in the School of Information at The University of Texas at Austin, is taking the lead on the website design. The website will point to resources, especially tools, highlight the wellness stories of librarians and library workers, and invite you to take part in some wellness challenges.
2. We will unveil some resources prior to marker events such as our ALA Midwinter Meeting, ALA Annual Conference, and National Library Workers

Day. These include a “Staying Healthy at Conference” handout, a personal health passport, and an environmental workplace scan. We will be working with the ALA-Allied Professional Association in making these resources available.

3. We are planning a Wellness Fair to take place at the 2008 ALA Annual Conference in Anaheim. We hope to be able to distribute fun and interesting information.

This year we would like to locate examples of how libraries are promoting wellness in their work environments and the wellness journeys of individual librarians and library workers. Here are two examples:

- The La Crosse (Wisconsin) Public Library focused on workplace wellness at last year’s staff day. Library staff were given time to attend information sessions or to schedule health appointments without having to use leave time. Mammograms and other health screenings were arranged by the city, which also covered the costs.
- Gloria Meraz, Editor of the Texas Library Journal, titled her spring 2007 column “Healthy, Wealthy & Wise.” She reminds us that “We stand for healthy minds; let’s stand for healthy lifestyles, too.”

In the following issue of TLJ she noted, “This spring I received more than the usual amount [of letters] about the piece on promoting healthy lifestyles within library ranks.” She reprinted a lengthy letter from Kimberly Michelle Gay, Spectrum Scholar and Academic Reference and Instruction Librarian at Prairie View A&M University’s John B. Coleman Library. Kimberly wrote about how she followed an exercise program coupled with a healthy eating plan to lose 150 pounds over three years. We congratulate Kimberly as she reminds us to “believe in yourself, stay positive and have the willpower to want to live a fulfilled life.”

The central Texas chapter of REFORMA, el Corazón de Tejas, is taking the lead on exploring how a professional organization can plan and implement a workplace wellness initiative. In fact, REFORMISTAS from el Corazón de Tejas are meeting tonight in Austin to start their plans for their year of exploring workplace wellness. Joining them is Monica Herrera, fitness trainer and hairstylist. I look forward to hearing their report.

Finally, let me just point you to some of the sources that we are discovering:

1. National Library of Medicine

For research reports: go back to National Library of Medicine’s American Indian Health page: <http://americanindianhealth.nlm.nih.gov>. Link 1 under Traditional Medicine is to PubMed where you can search for the most recent scholarly publications on Native Americans and Traditional Medicine.

I also like the NLM's Managing Stress tutorial. I am especially fond of the advice regarding massage therapy.
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/tutorials/managingstress/htm/index.htm>

2. U.S. Department of Agriculture

You will find MyPyramid Tracker to assess your food intake and physical activity. <http://www.mypyramidtracker.gov>

3. womenshealth.gov from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Lots of links, statistics, notes about campaigns and events, recursos en español (encluyendo preguntas frecuentes). My favorite section is the health tools: heart disease risk test, cost of smoking cigarettes, quit smoking calendar (if you quit smoking right now, within 20 minutes your blood pressure drops; if you quit tomorrow, your chance of having a heart attack goes down; if you quit in five years your risk of having a stroke is the same as for someone who doesn't smoke, and if you quit in 17 years your risk of having heart disease is also the same as for someone who doesn't smoke). I used the BMI calculator—it'll tell you if you're underweight, normal weight, overweight, or obese. Just like your mother, but without the added stories or advice!

4. Medical Library Association's "Top Ten" useful websites

These appear in the MLA's Medspeak brochure, which is also available in Spanish (Descifrando el Lenguaje Médico). <http://www.mlanet.org>

5. The University of Texas at Austin's University Library's Ergonomics page offers good advice: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/ergonomics>

6. You've heard about the advice to take 10,000 steps a day. You can go to <http://10000steps.org.au> and enroll for a free Step Log!

7. Healthy Living: Your Weekly Guide to Wellness

I especially like the activity calculator. I found that I burn 116 calories by sitting in my office and doing light office work. I burn 193 calories an hour by doing filing or copying.
http://greenbaypressgazette.ctwfeatures.com/health/health_20070615_volunteering.html

8. Rez Robics

Aerobics for Indian people! <http://www.dreamcatchers.org/rezrobics/>

9. The Lance Armstrong Foundation produces great resources including survivorship notebooks.

Let us challenge ourselves. Let us provide resources for our people. Let us explore health with humor and through caring for and nurturing each other. Let us stay alert. Let us not be marginalized due to actions that we can try to control. Join the Circle of Wellness@Your Library.

What can you do to participate in our efforts? Send me your stories. To start you thinking about what you can contribute, let us start you off with a small gift from the Lance Armstrong Foundation—a coupon for a cancer survivorship notebook for your public library and a LIVESTRONG™ wristband.

References

1. Peacock, Thomas and Marlene Wisuri, The Four Hills of Life: Ojibwe Wisdom (Afton, Minnesota: Afton Historical Society Press, 2006), 78.
2. Weatherford, Jack. Indian Givers: How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1988).
3. Meeker, James E., Joan E. Elias, and John A. Heim, Plants Used by the Great Lakes Ojibwa (Odanah, Wisconsin: Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, 1993).