# ‘Wellness Wednesdays’: Enhancing Resiliency in DVM Students

Peter Conlon[1], BSc(Agr), MSc, DVM, PhD, MEd; Elizabeth Lowenger[1], BSc, MSc;
Dorothy Bakker[2], BSc, MD, MA, CCFP, FCFP
[1]Ontario Veterinary College, University of Guelph, and [2]Student Health Services, University of Guelph

Ontario Veterinary College — OPUS VETERINUM CIVIBUS

University of Guelph — Changing Lives Improving Life

## BACKGROUND

Veterinary students have been shown to have a high level of stress, anxiety and depression (1, 2), which is influenced by social and health factors (3). In the profession, suicide rates amongst veterinarians in the UK are higher than in any medical profession (4). Surveys of our DVM students have indicated over a 30% prevalence of self-reported depression used standard measures (unpublished data).

## PURPOSE

In order to heighten awareness among student veterinarians of available resources and services, and to provide them with wellness ‘tools’ to thrive in the DVM program and beyond, a preventive programming strategy was developed in the form of ‘Wellness Wednesdays’.

## METHODS

In the 2014/15 academic year, the office of the Associate Dean, Students and the OVC Peer Helpers organized a series of eight talks (Table 1) with guest speakers who addressed dimensions of wellness in the context of veterinary medicine (5). These presentations, occurred over the lunch hour (food was provided), for the eight months of the DVM program. Although directed to DVM students, they were open to the entire OVC community.

| 2014 – 2015 ‘WELLNESS WEDNESDAY’ Topics | Wellness Domain | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Emotional | Environmental | Financial | Intellectual | Occupational | Physical | Social | Spiritual |
| Making the most of your learning style - Kandice Runyon – BEd, DVM student | | | | x | | | | |
| Issues faced by current OVC students - Dr. Dorothy Bakker, MD | x | | | x | x | | | |
| Thriving financially as a DVM student - Kevin Bewick, Certified Financial Planner | | | x | | | | | |
| Balanced lifestyles and how to support each other - Diana Chinnery, U of G Counselling & Student Accessibility Services | x | | | | | | x | x |
| Evidence-based strategies from positive psychology for emotional health and well-being - Dr. Steve Noonan, DVM | x | | | x | | | | |
| Living sustainably as a student - Dr. Maurice Nelischer, Director for Sustainability | | x | | | x | | | |
| Intergenerational communication: understanding faculty, staff, future clients - Dr. Sean Lyons, Department of Management | | | | | x | | x | |
| Feeding your brain during exams (easy and fast healthy eating) - Dietician Lindzie O’Rielly | x | | | x | | x | | |

**Table 1:** Subjects for the 2014-2015 Wellness Wednesday talks and the domains of wellness addressed.

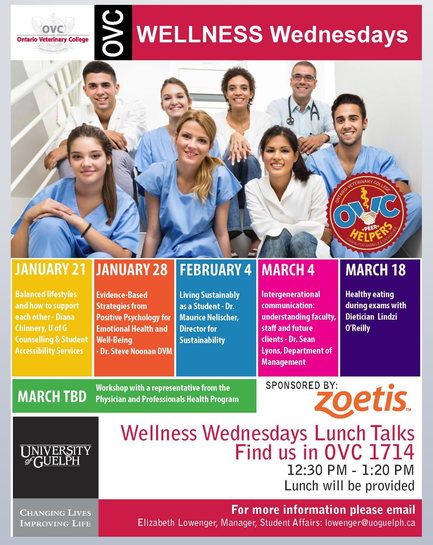


**Figure 1:** Promotional poster for winter 2015 semester sessions

## RESULTS

### Student Feedback

An exit survey (Figure 2) was carried out after each talk to assess participants’ views on the value of the presentations in increasing their resiliency (defined as the ability to bounce back or recover from stress). Based on this feedback, 90.8% of the 282 responses indicated that participation in the Wellness Wednesday series contributed to increasing their resiliency (Figure 3).

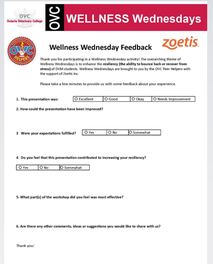


**Figure 2:** Feedback form

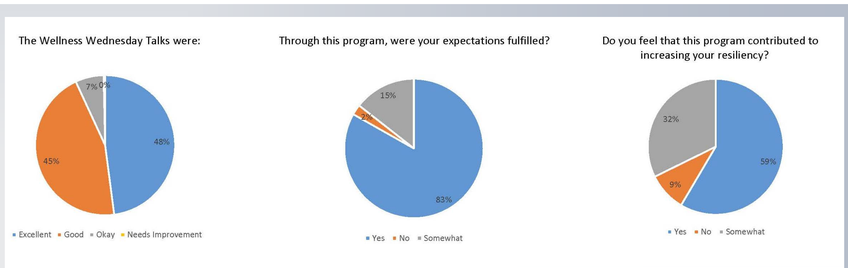


**Figure 3:** Summary of feedback from Wellness Wednesday talks

## CONCLUSION

While the majority of students surveyed found the ‘Wellness Wednesdays’ sessions to be positive and helpful, ultimately the success of this initiative will be expressed as a more resilient DVM student population who take the skills and strategies learned into the workplace when they graduate. Some measures of this would be:

- Increased use of preventative services
- Lower levels of mental health challenges
- Increased levels of resiliency within the DVM student population and, within the next 3-5 years, our new veterinary alumni.
- Increased knowledge among students and alumni of services available to them

## CONTINUATION OF WELLNESS PROGRAMMING

- Incorporation of resiliency training into our orientation for the incoming DVM students
- Inclusion of resiliency training in the first-year curriculum in the course Art of Veterinary Medicine I.
- Continuation of the Wellness Wednesday talks with content based on surveying current DVM students’ topic requests (Figure 4)
- OVC conducts a survey for the graduates and their employers one year after graduation. A resiliency dimension could be added to this to track recent graduates’ resiliency.

**Figure 4:** Topics of interest for future Wellness Wednesday talks as expressed by DVM students

## REFERENCES

1. Reisbig et al, Veterinary Medical Student Well-being: Depression, Stress, and Personal Relationships, *Journal of Veterinary Medical Education*, **39**(4):341-58 (2012)
2. Hafen et al., Predictors of Depression and Anxiety in First-Year Veterinary Students: A Preliminary Report, *Journal of Veterinary Medical Education*, **33**(3): 432-440 (2006)
3. Hafen, M. J., Ratcliffe, G. C., & Rush, B. R., Veterinary medical student well-being: depression, stress and personal relationships. *Journal of Veterinary Medical Education*, **40**(3), 296-302 (2013)
4. Bartram, D, & Baldwin, D. S, Veterinary surgeons and suicide: a structured review of possible influences on increased risk, *Veterinary Record*, **166**(13): 388-97. (2010)
5. Swarbrick, M., A Wellness Approach. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, **29**(4), 311–314 (2006)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to Zoetis® for their financial support of the Wellness Wednesdays series.