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Commentary

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THE HEALTH DISCOURSE BLOG

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In late 2018 Otago Polytechnic launched a new blog to add to the variety of our channels for the dissemination of research. We provide a platform that encourages discourse about health and wellbeing from the perspectives of many health disciplines. The aim is to improve health practice and hence the health and wellbeing of individuals, family/whānau and communities. The blog is open for contributions and comments. It can be read at healthdiscourse.nz

At the start of 2021, Associate Professor Lesley Gill, and Lesley Brook joined one of the original editors (then) Associate Professor Jean Ross as co-editors. The new team decided to take a transdisciplinary approach. We began a series of blog posts that engaged with the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals as inspiration and structure for contributors to discuss a wide range of implications for health and wellbeing.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2019) were developed in 2015 with a focus to transform our world with a focus on sustainability by 2030. These goals are important for us all to pay attention to in our everyday life, activities, and plans. The links between these goals are both implicit and explicit. Health is a significant example depicted in SDG 3 Good Health and Wellbeing as well as an implicit component of Goals 2, 6, 11 and 12. The broad focus of the SDGs assist us to coordinate the different interests of colleagues; mobilise collective action and “help create shared global understandings about the issues and problem at hand” (Monkelbaan, 2019, p. 4).



We have also been using Te Whare Tapa Wha, a holistic model for wellness from a Māori perspective developed by Sir Mason Durie. This four-sided house provides blog post writers with four lenses to examine some of the health and wellbeing implications of each SDG. This model focuses on wellness as a four-sided whare or house. Each of the four sides of the whare are representative of four aspects of health and wellness, first, taha wairua (spiritual health), second, wairua, the role of the whānau (family) and third the balance of the hinengaro (mind) are as important as the fourth side of the whare-physical manifestations of illness (Te Whare Tapa Wha).

We invited a wide range of contributors from diverse disciplinary backgrounds to each contribute a short post of about 500 words. Most but not all contributors are staff of Otago Polytechnic Ltd because of the breadth and variety of our research and expertise. For each invited contributor, we nominated one SDG and one aspect of Te Whare Tapa Whā which we asked them to be guided by in thinking and writing for their contributed post. We were often able to add an explanation about why we were inviting this person to write on this SDG.

We gave each contributor a deadline and asked them to follow the writing style for the blog:


1. The first paragraph needs to comment on the dual theme for your post, i.e. the SDG and the wellbeing lens that we have asked you to use.
2. Your writing may be informed by your own or others' research but doesn't have to be.
3. Your writing may include personal reflection but does not need to.
4. You need to include one or two images or figures that are relevant to the content of your blog which you have permission to publish and refer to those images in your text.
5. You may include recommendations in your conclusion.
6. Please identify references in your text, e.g. by numbers or author/date, then list references in full at the bottom of your post.


This writing style allowed for a variety of voices to emerge, contributing to a rich discussion. Contributions are copy-edited by one of the co-editors on a monthly rotation. On occasion we will ask a contributor to further develop an aspect of their post. We have also upon request given feedback on draft posts.

We have been publishing posts on one SDG per month sequentially, beginning with SDG 1 in March 2021, with a break after November 2021 before starting again in April 2022. For each SDG we publish an introduction, four contributors' posts – one on each of the four aspects of wellbeing – and a reflection, which usually includes a call to action. Each contributed blog post has a suitable image, and a short bio of the contributor. Each contribution is tagged to the relevant SDG, the aspect of wellbeing from Te Whare Tapa Whā, and the type of content – whether it is research, report, or commentary.

Our focus has deliberately been on the publication of engaging content that is relevant to Aotearoa New Zealand. We link to the blog from Otago Polytechnic social media accounts and encourage our contributors to do so also with their own blog posts. We welcome more subscribers and comments on the posts to contribute to this discourse.

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