

## **H=P + 5E + 3H**

It seems that people are always looking for ways to be happy. One group that says happiness eludes them are people with serious diseases such as cancer. Generally, most of us are interested in the ways and formulas people use to find happiness. Naturally, I was intrigued when I saw a recent Reuters report “The Formula for Happiness?” I wondered how one could make a simple equation that tells us what makes for happiness. Two British researchers created this equation for happiness after interviewing 1,000 people:

$$H=P + 5E + 3H$$

After looking at what makes up the three parts, defining happiness is perhaps somewhat easier than quantifying it. The three parts deal with personal characteristics (P), the life style (E for existence) and a group of factors, called Higher Order (H). Moreover, breaking down the formula into its components, shows that happiness really depends on the key aspects of living. So it is general, wide-ranging, and open to anyone’s definition of the variables the researchers identified. Personal characteristics concern one’s outlook on life, adaptability and resilience. The E part includes health, friendships and financial stability while the H variables include self-esteem, expectations and ambitions.

The researchers found that women’s happiness was highly influenced by “sunny weather, being with family and losing weight... while romance, sex, hobbies and victories by their favorite sports teams were more important to men.”

Classifying the responses seems somewhat simplistic. Health does not seem to be a significant factor in the men’s and women’s responses. Yet, it’s possible to infer that each of the three groups includes health or a health-related factor. How one sees himself as a result of illness certainly affects his self-esteem and ambitions. I am reminded that one prominent network journalist who was terminally ill with cancer complained that his illness was interfering with his work. His expectations for accomplishment were no less than before the disease, it was just that they would be a little harder to achieve.

Serious disease is often the reason for a person distancing himself or herself from others by withdrawal or becoming so immersed in dealing with their disease. This can have two devastating effects. The first is that the companionship and support needed for well-being and balance are gone. In estrangement from others, it is too easy to lose the perspective needed for positive management of the disease.

The second effect is that patients expend an excess of energy-overkill-in dealing with their disease, so there is little or no energy left for productive activity. Investing time and effort in other activities so there is a balance in one’s life has often been found to be as beneficial as medication and contribute to healing. Even when cure is not possible, commitment to an activity has contributed to lengthening life. For example, studies have found that terminally ill people survive longer than is expected when they want to attend some significant event.

Coping with serious disease places significant demands on one's adaptability and resilience which in turn requires energy as well as a positive outlook. Curiosity and productive activities are major sources for creating energy. Commitment to something you want or do seems to result in an energy explosion. These effects are not age related. Linus Pauling was reported to have the enthusiasm and curiosity of a young child even at ninety years of age. In his book *Flow = The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Csikszentmihalyi, points out that (1) concentrating on what we are doing and (2) doing something where "...hours pass by in minutes..." are two of the eight components that can cause "...a sense of deep enjoyment that is so rewarding people feel that expending a great deal of energy is worthwhile simply to be able to feel it." What a great way to create one's own medication.