

**Prioritizing health and wellness in  
post-secondary classrooms**

**by  
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## Ethics Statement

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or

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## **Abstract**

Health and wellness have taken a front-and-center position in the modern post-secondary landscape. Despite this, few post-secondary programs integrate dimensional wellness and stress theory into the curriculum and how this integration occurs is poorly documented. This action research study utilized a facilitated mini-lesson and two surveys to explore what post-secondary students know about personal health, wellness, and stress. Ten individuals participated at the College of New Caledonia in Prince George, British Columbia. Findings demonstrated that students were significantly stressed and identified exercise and reflective practices as most beneficial to reduce that stress. Most importantly, participants believe the classroom should include stress theory and strategies to support overall wellness.

**Keywords:** Wellness; Stress; Classroom; Dimensional; Initiatives

## **Dedication**

I thank everyone who brought this educational opportunity to Prince George at CNC. The instructors' and my colleagues' knowledge and positivity were invaluable in motivating me to succeed and promoting personal growth. I would also like to thank my partner Lindsay and my daughter Elwynn for their unconditional support as I pursued this degree.

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# Introduction

Health and wellness have taken a seat of paramount importance in the lives of post-secondary students providing impetus for colleges and universities to become healthier settings. For clarity, we will define wellness as a multi-dimensional, synergistic construct oriented toward optimizing the health potential inherent to every individual (Roscoe, 2009). Expressed student needs for wellness issues are increasing. Beiter et al. (2015) report stress and mental health struggles leading to increased post-secondary counselling visits ranging from 173%-231% (p.90). To mitigate these hardships, education institutions must provide their learners with what they need to succeed and "embed health into all aspects of campus culture, across the administration and academic mandates" (Okanagan Charter, 2015, p.3). Additionally, instructors should embrace the idea that a classroom is a place of significance in a student's journey and, therefore, should promote health and wellness initiatives that are comprehensive, holistic, and available to all. Consequently, it is reasonable that higher education classrooms should have embedded wellness theory and strategies to support learners in their educational and life experiences.

This study sought to understand learners' wellness experiences at the College of New Caledonia (CNC) and what dimensions of health and wellness each valued through a mixed-method survey. Like many post-secondary institutions, the College provides various wellness resources to help promote awareness. However, in-class programming is not currently offered in most curriculums. As a CNC employee with six years of instructional experience and twenty years of experience in nursing, I have a personal interest in seeing wellness ideals integrated into our programming. To support wellness and learning, this action research sought to explore how a mini-lesson on health, including stress theory, dimensional wellness, and self-care strategies, might shift students' actions and perspectives on their wellbeing. The hope is that this research will be part of organizational and cultural changes to help learners self-assess and take steps to promote their dimensional wellbeing.

# Literature Review

To refine the literature review for this research, I searched for material related to student stress, health-promoting facilities, integrated wellness and holistic health within post-secondary settings.

## Health Promotion and Healthy Universities

The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion challenged individuals to view health as a resource leveraged in everyday living rather than a life objective and acknowledge that this health is created daily (Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, 1986). Many years later, delegates from prominent British Columbian universities, and other international post-secondary organizations, came together in the name of health promotion in Kelowna, British Columbia. The resulting Okanagan Charter builds on the ideas of the Ottawa Charter's health promotion aims and brings forth suggestions for action that will increase dialogue and research between campuses and integrate health into post-secondary policy, practices and all aspects of campus culture (Okanagan Charter, 2015). The Okanagan Charter's goal to increase networking and communication between organizations led to the formation of The Canadian Health Promoting Universities and Colleges Network. This group of wellness-promoting organizations, including the University of British Columbia, Concordia University and many others, have each made unique commitments to adopt the primary mandates of the Okanagan Charter. These organizations are joined internationally by Healthy Universities in the United Kingdom and like-minded entities in New Zealand and Germany. There is increasing interest in moving beyond a single-issue focus toward a setting that embraces post-secondary institutions as a system and a learner as a whole (Healthy Universities, 2021; Innstrand & Christensen, 2020; Lisnyj et al., 2021; Okanagan Charter, 2015; Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, n.d.). Holt et al. (2015) describe a healthy institution as one that "aspires to create a learning environment and organizational culture that enhances the health, wellbeing and sustainability of its community and enables people to achieve their full potential" (p.675).

As a nurse educator, I see holistic approaches throughout health care theory and instruction; I desire to see how holistic education, mainly around wellness, can be presented to all college students. The reactive services designed to assist students experiencing stressors and hardships are dated and no longer serve modern proactive learners. For example, a study by Cawood et al. (2010) suggests that higher education is a little behind in wellness initiatives secondary to its elitist history, leaving it presumably unable to tackle issues of inequity. However, several established Canadian institutions have embraced the challenge of becoming health-promoting spaces. For example, The University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, University of Calgary and others have formally adopted the Okanagan Charter to guide wellbeing initiatives (Wellbeing UBC, n.d.). Smaller institutions like CNC have also expanded wellness promotion and services over the past several years. At the same time, several articles lament that all post-secondary institutions lag in the previously mentioned whole-system approach (Cawood et al., 2010; Innstrand & Christensen, 2020) that would see wellness initiatives embedded into all aspects of an organization.

A holistic, positive approach is the best way to promote student success (Cawood et al., 2010; Innstrand & Christensen, 2020; Holt et al., 2015). For instance, Innstrand and Christensen (2020) propose that health promotion often focuses on altering lifestyle choices to decrease adverse outcomes instead of promoting the positive. Post-secondary students are well aware of the negatives of smoking or alcohol use. Still, they are often less aware of the positives of health-promoting activities like relaxation techniques and mindfulness. Additionally, a lack of communication and connection leaves learners unaware of services available or how to access them (Lisnyj et al., 2021). Therefore, influential health-promoting entities require intimate awareness of available resources and the use of encouragement to access them at the forefront of their efforts (Holt et al., 2015).

## **Stress and time constraints in the post-secondary environment**

Research indicated that students' stress, anxiety and chronic illness are increasing (Beauchemin et al., 2018; Beiter et al., 2015; Dooris et al., 2021; Lisnyj et al., 2021;

Pocaisk, Bauman & Johnson, 2019; Stuart et al., 2018). For instance, a recent Canadian study by Lisnyj et al. (2021) identifies that 60.8 percent of student respondents reported above-average stress within the last year (p.1). Conversely, as stress and anxiety rise, academic performance and student retention suffer (Beauchemin et al., 2018; Lisnyj et al., 2021). A few articles focus on the student population's increased prevalence of non-communicable diseases like diabetes secondary to unhealthy lifestyles and risky behaviours such as inactivity and poor diet (Deasy et al., 2015; Beauchemin et al., 2018; Bland et al., 2017). Beauchemin et al. (2018) and Bland et al. (2017) argue that traditional approaches rooted in western medicine are inadequate in enhancing and promoting wellness.

Time constraints are an additional factor leading to increased stress and a lack of opportunities to practice wellness-promoting activities. Students report difficulties transitioning to the post-secondary environment and balancing social, home and work demands (Lisnyj et al. 2021; Pelletier & Laska, 2012). Additionally, it stated that a lack of time was the most common barrier to physical activity, with paid jobs, schoolwork, and family commitments often stated as creating these barriers (Pelletier & Laska, 2012).

## **Classroom opportunities**

While institutions enhance resources and awareness, teachers can directly promote self-care and wellness strategies through instruction and augmenting the curriculum (Holt et al., 2015). Recently, Manchester universities adopting the previously mentioned Healthy Universities approach, have integrated wellness education into the academic curriculum, leveraging the power of the classroom to deliver essential lessons about accessible, evidence-based wellness strategies (Holt & Powell, 2017). Holt and Powell (2017) also suggest that this period of life is often transitional for learners and requires custom-tailored wellness programming best fitting the student body (p.57).

Several mixed-method studies combine wellness activities and theory, including action and experimental aspects (Georgetown University, 2012; Pocaisk, Bauman & Johnson, 2019; Wolfe & Moran, 2017). Qualitative data from the Georgetown

Universities Englehard project (2012) saw overwhelmingly positive praise from students, with one reporting feeling "cared for, like the professor was genuinely interested in our wellbeing" (p.9). Wolfe and Moran's (2017) study included a unique neuro-scientific angle to support students in their understanding of brain function and decrease stress through contemplation and yoga. As an intermediate-level yogi, I have experienced firsthand the incredible power of meditative practices integrated into most yoga activities. I feel this has a place in the self-care solution. Other suggested in-class activities that promote wellness include mindfulness exercises, tai chi, guided meditation, and going outside for class (Pocaisk, Bauman, & Johnson, 2019). The role of the physical environment in post-secondary institutions also yielded some valuable results. Bogerd et al. (2018) found that spaces incorporating greenery were more appealing and refreshing to students. Moving a class outside, incorporating movement breaks, was identified as increasing learner attention and building the all-important feeling of the in-class community (Bogerd et al., 2018; Pocaisk, Bauman, & Johnson, 2019).

## **Frameworks and Paradigms**

Many institutions embrace this new wellness paradigm but are at varying places in this transformative process. Institutions with complete and seamlessly integrated health-promoting strategies are the ultimate goal; however, there is no standardized process to achieve this. Institutional enhancements like increased services and enhanced wellness policy are expected and needed. Still, several articles point to a lack of standardized constructs and limited evidence-based models that leave wellness initiatives untethered and lacking cohesion (Beauchemin et al., 2018; Innstrand & Christensen, 2020; Dooris, Wills, & Newton, 2014). For example, Beauchemin et al. (2018) contend that "there is a need for more rigorous study designs, examination of mechanisms of change, and consensus related to conceptualizations of wellness and component definitions to inform wellness-promotion efforts, and ultimately support health-enhancing change within the existing lifestyle culture on college campuses" (p.36).

Additionally, Innstrand and Christensen (2020) assert, "In general, knowledge on how to implement a Healthy University approach remains poorly documented" (p.69).

Indeed, the articles did highlight the problematic lack of structure in current post-secondary wellness programming; however, they also understood this implementation as an evolutionary process and shed light on some shared, positive themes. Firstly, actions that establish new frameworks must be student-driven (Beauchemin et al., 2018; Dooris, Wills, & Newton, 2014; Innstrand & Christensen, 2020). Second, each post-secondary institution must consider the unique needs of its learners, creating the said framework (Innstrand & Christensen, 2020). Lastly, an effective process for implementing changes is required (Innstrand & Christensen, 2020; Beauchemin et al., 2018). Innstrand & Christensen (2020) present the ARK system as a salutogenic approach that includes surveys, systematic mapping of social conditions and a 5-phase implementation process. This study also brought forward the unique perspective of the wellness of employees as crucial to the process and suggested that wellness initiatives also be offered to faculty genuinely embracing the idea of a healthy facility. Additional themes discovered in the literature review included: effective leadership for health sustainability and caring campus initiatives.

## Research Questions

When COVID-19 forced classes to an online format, instructors faced many challenges. One of these was simplifying coursework, assignments, and materials into something manageable and relevant to already stressed learners. In response, I chose to highlight the existing topics of wellness and self-care. As a result, my students reported significant health and wellness benefits, including an appreciation for the sense of community in sharing these experiences. If these efforts were fruitful for these learners, could these wellness and self-care initiatives also be helpful for all students at CNC? This line of thought led me to the questions defining my research.

1. How do integrated, instructor-promoted health and wellness theory and self-care activities positively affect learners' post-secondary experiences?
  - a. What are the time requirements for such activities?
2. What activities/theories are most helpful in reducing learner stress and increasing perceived or actual overall wellness?

# **Methodology**

## **Design**

Paradigmatically, the study was action-oriented. Data was collected through two quantitatively focused surveys that included the opportunity for qualitative responses to provide stories and context. Hybrid approaches find the middle ground between the shallowness of quantitative and the subjectivity of qualitative methods (O'Leary, 2017). Additionally, Creswell (2012) stated that hybrid methods are the best fit for this study as the research questions were best answered by both the "numbers and the stories" (p.535). This choice was logical as a novice researcher looking to make the most of the collected data. After all, experiences around health and wellbeing include personal or spiritual aspects that are hard to quantify. The mixed methods surveys then explored the general understanding of students' experiences and of wellness through quantitative measures. At the same time, the open-ended questions provided stories and added context to participants' views (Punch, 2016). I attempted to create something new and purposeful through a facilitated lesson and wellness resources list that could eventually benefit all CNC students. O'Leary (2017) suggests that change happens via research in action-based models (p.176).

## **Context of Study**

The study occurred at the College of New Caledonia in Prince George, BC. CNC is a multi-campus organization spanning central and northern BC with 8,725 students and roughly 737 employees. A diverse student body includes a 50-50 male-female split, 2,122 international students and 1,613 students identifying as aboriginal in 2019-2020. CNC's programming is mixed, with Business Management, Trades, Health, Arts & Sciences the most prominent (College of New Caledonia Institutional Accountability Plan and Report, 2020).



## **Participants**

Initial plans to conduct an in-person mini-lesson to fulfill the action research section of the study in a series of classrooms outside of health care programs were largely unsuccessful. Conducting this study during the COVID-19 pandemic is one likely factor impacting instructor willingness. These obstacles required a shift to a purely online format and a move to gather individual participants facilitated by a third party from late January to April 2022. There was an opportunity in March to conduct an in-person lesson as a guest facilitator for an Applied Business and Technology class where permission was sought from each student (see Appendix A). Once I used several additional documents to secure participants and provide links to materials and data collection tools. Emailed invitation letters were sent to several instructors in January and February 2022 (see Appendix B). Instructors that did respond could either not find a suitable day to fit in a guest lecture or could not release class time to accommodate it. The study ended with 10 unique participants and 17 completed surveys.

## **Procedures**

Invitations were sent to non-healthcare faculty and students via a third party. Willing participants were then sent a link to the first survey that included questions about stress levels, ranking the importance of dimensions of wellness, plus extracting personal information to contextualize these answers through qualitative data. Next, the mini-lesson was facilitated via an online link or in person. The mini-lesson was around half an hour and covered stress response theory, dimensional wellness information and self-care/mindfulness strategies. At the end of the lesson, participants were guided to a link to wellness resources (see Appendix C). In-person participants were given a physical copy of these resources. Lastly, a second survey was sent via email 3-4 weeks later to reassess stress levels and gauge perceived, or actual, changes to thoughts and activities around personal health and wellness.

## **Benefits and Risks**

This study aimed to improve the student experience at CNC and assist in recognizing and managing stress. Information collected could support the evolution of in-class wellness theory plus activities and be a part of the drive to embed these across all curriculums. The activities in the project were a minimal risk. However, there is often discomfort when analyzing one's deficiencies or seeking personal growth (Fishbach & Woolley, 2022).

## **Ethical Considerations**

The researcher's great responsibility is to ensure the work's character and integrity align with ethical principles (O'Leary, 2017). This study underwent ethical review through the SFU Office of Research Ethics and the College of New Caledonia. This study adhered to the tri-council guidelines and adhered to the following principles during the research:

***Beneficence:*** the purpose of these services is to do good and serve the needs of our learners. All decisions made in establishing policy and services need to ask if they are in the best interest of learners. In this light, the study materials included a compilation of organizational and local health and wellness resources provided to support participants in their wellness journey (see Appendix C). The material avoided negative language and consequence-based language.

***Justice:*** language considerate of culture and individuality is essential in today's world. A primary mandate of this project is to bring needed resources and wellness tools to all our learners. Attempts were made to create a feeling of genuine caring by explicitly describing the study's purpose and sharing contextual stories of personal wellness activities.

***Confidentiality:*** As an experienced health care professional, I am no stranger to privacy and confidentiality. This study adhered to the obligations of safeguarding entrusted information and respecting individual privacy rights (Government of Canada, 2022). My

email script explicitly stated that any information provided would be treated with respect and used only for the stated purposes of the study (see Appendix E). SFU Survey Monkey has guarded collected data and storage. Collated data has no identifiers. Since the nature of the study activities passively had a community-building component, the hope is that in-person participants were comfortable sharing experiences of wellness, keeping privacy and confidentiality concerns to a minimum. I will keep analyzed data on a password-protected computer for no longer than five years.

***Compensation:*** Since my project required more of the participants than just completing a single survey, the study offered entry into a draw for participation. Two \$100 health-related prizes were given away via a random draw. One certificate to a local business integrating many wellness services, including float therapy, and one yoga pass good for five classes to help promote stress-relieving wellness activities.

## **Limitations**

A sample size of 10 participants and 17 unique surveys leaves no room for in-depth statistical analysis or the numbers considered statistically accurate. The study would require approximately 350 respondents for an error tolerance of +/- five percent (SurveyMonkey, 2022). Secondly, accessing learners in another instructor's classroom proved more difficult than expected. As such, only one face-to-face facilitation of the mini-lesson occurred while other participants viewed an online version. While online modalities have their uses, in-person conversations are more effective in creating the caring environment best suited to self-care and wellness subject matter. This lack of a personal approach left my initial research question without the hoped-for answers. In place of understanding how instructor-led self-care activities may help learners, the data provided information on learner stress levels and what activities learners found helpful in relieving stress. Next, this data can only be relevant within CNC. Awareness of wellness initiatives and programming depends significantly on the organization's ability to inform and inspire its student population effectively. Lastly, my study was initially designed around a more comprehensive set of self-care and wellness initiatives I would facilitate through several class visits. As it became clear that those instructors willing to

participate could not allocate that kind of time, I shifted to a more straightforward format and included a recording of my mini-lesson. This loss of an in-person focus left a few of the questions in the post-survey lacking context and impact. A few questions allude to instructor-led interventions, suggesting more than just the mini-lesson confused some participants, as evidenced by their feedback.

## Findings

Despite low response rate to the two surveys, which limited analysis possibilities, the descriptive analysis still provided insights into this small group of students' wellness experiences. Qualitative responses were analyzed, themed, and basic statistical was performed on the quantitative responses. The number of respondents in each survey is represented by *n*. Survey #1 had 7 responses (*n*=7) while Survey #2 had 10 (*n*=10) participants.

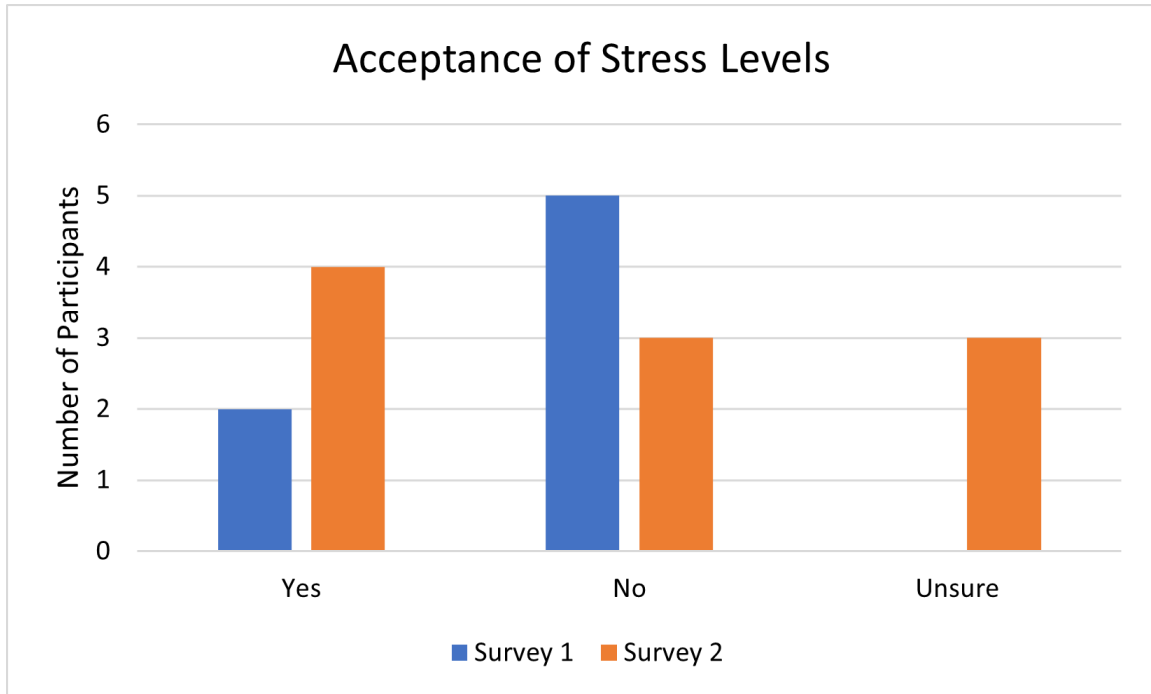
### Student Stress Levels

The participating students surveyed at CNC reported experiencing high levels of stress. Nearly sixty percent (*n*=4) of respondents in Survey #1 reported current stress levels of 7 or higher on a scale of 10. In addition, seventy-one percent (*n*=5) of the same respondents said their current levels of stress as unacceptable to them. Compounding these worrying statistics, awareness of wellness resources that could potentially assist them in reducing stress levels was generally lacking, with almost fifty percent (*n*=3) of respondents unaware of any. The lack of awareness of support was also evident from participants' open-ended responses to 3 of 7 students indicated they had no awareness of resources at CNC; while others acknowledged they knew about "wellness counselling, wellness coaches (participant 1g), "mental health wellness centre" (participant 1f), and "counselling" (participant 1c). Another participant noted that the College "had like stress week."

A compilation of health-promoting resources was provided to students, including organizational and local entities, to assist access to wellness-promoting services. The hope was that learners might pursue action and knowledge and identify their needs to reduce stress to acceptable levels by the time Survey #2 was available. Curiously, while the weighted average of stress levels between Survey #1 and #2 went down only slightly, the reported acceptable stress levels changed significantly. Specifically, in Survey #1, only thirty percent (*n*=2) found their stress levels acceptable to them, while seventy percent (*n*=5) found them unacceptable. However, seventy percent (*n*=7) of Survey #2

respondents felt their stress levels were acceptable or were uncertain, while only thirty percent ( $n=3$ ) said no. These statistics are represented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Representing acceptance of stress levels pre and post-study participation**



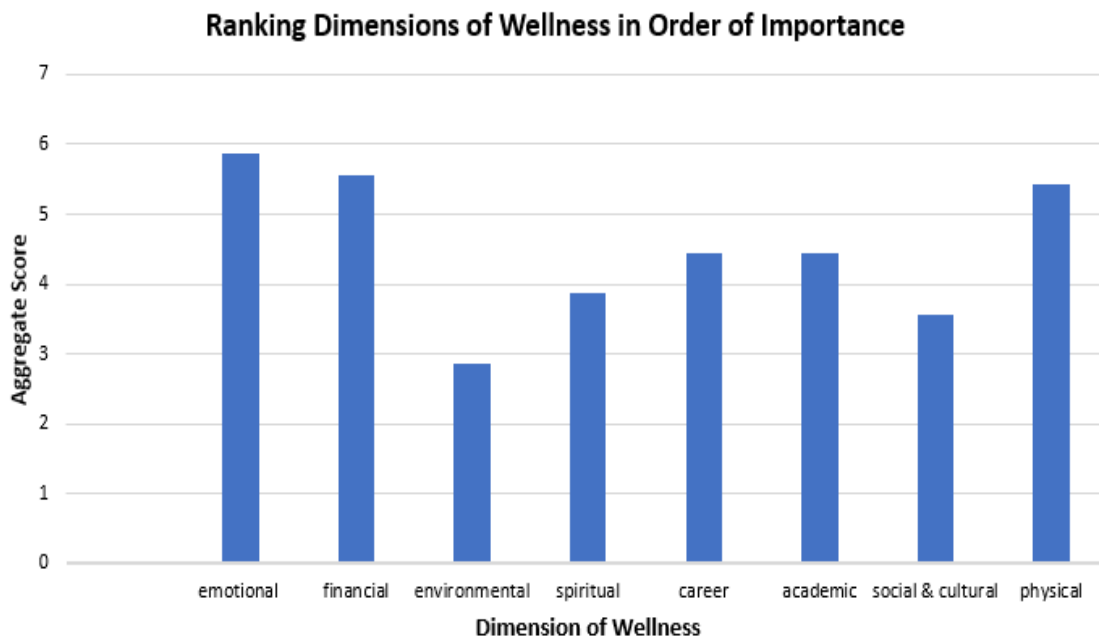
*Note.* A comparison of survey 1 and survey 2 participants of those finding current stress levels acceptable(yes), unacceptable (no) or unsure.

## Activities and Dimensions of Wellness

Participants were asked about what they currently do to relieve stress and what they consider stress-relieving activities. Survey #1 respondents who reported practicing stress-relieving activities identified their actions to promote wellness. Responses included "walking, yoga and baseball" (participant 1b), "talk to supports" (participant 1e), and "reading, journaling, sleep to music" (participant 1g). Next, participants were asked to report what activities they considered relevant stress-relieving activities. Going for a walk ( $n=2$ ), watching movies ( $n=2$ ), or exercising ( $n=3$ ), music ( $n=2$ ) were mentioned multiple times while drawing, yoga, driving, talking, hobbies and evaluating goals once ( $n=1$ ).

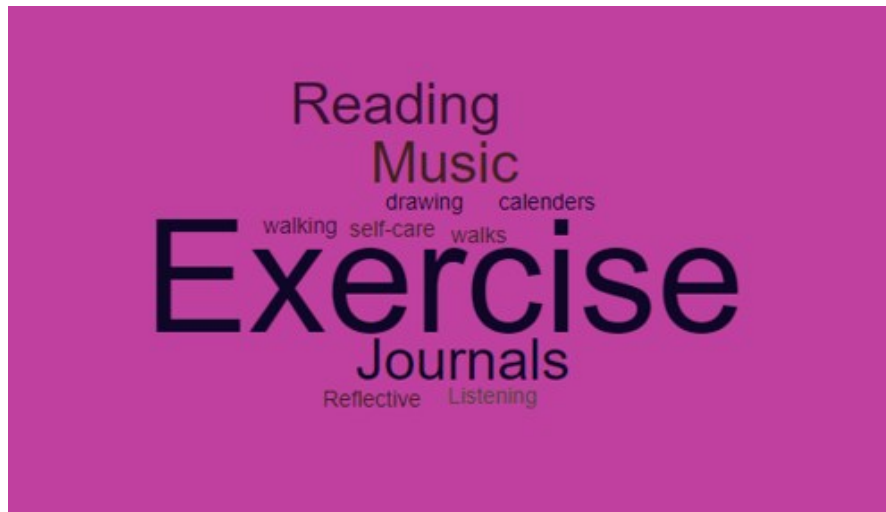
Survey #1 requested a personal ranking of wellness dimensions without knowing how knowledgeable participants about holistic wellbeing were. While emotional, financial, and physical garnered the highest rankings, the rest of the categories were, on average, very close. Regardless, there was much variance in the raw data as some respondents chose a dimension as their most important and others chose it as their most minor, leaving category rankings best described as polarized.

**Figure 2. Participants Rank the Importance of Different Wellness Dimensions**



Survey #2 asked which wellness and self-care activities proved most helpful in feeling good over the semester. Popular responses included reading, music and journaling with exercise identified as most beneficial in reducing stress and promoting feelings of wellness as demonstrated in Figure 3.

**Figure 3. Activities most helpful in reducing stress over the semester**



*Note.* Larger words indicate responses given most frequently

Survey #2 also requested identifying any new activities undertaken over the semester. Thirty percent ( $n=3$ ) of respondents stated they were able to try some new activities such as "softball" (participant 2b), "walk new places" (participant 2d), and "journaling" (participant 2h).

## **Belief**

Survey #1 revealed that Eighty-five percent ( $n=6$ ) of respondents felt that wellness activities and theories embedded into their course could be beneficial. Likewise, Survey #2 demonstrated that seventy percent ( $n=7$ ) of participants felt neutral or agreed that the time invested in the study, and the following activities, benefited them during the semester. Lastly, no respondents disagreed that these theories and initiatives have value, with fifty percent ( $n=5$ ) agreeing or strongly agreeing that wellness-promoting theory and activities should be included in post-secondary classrooms.

## **Time, Limitations & Participation**

Respondents to Survey #1 believe they have the time to commit to daily health and wellness initiatives. Seventy percent ( $n=5$ ) of participants reported they could spend 30-120 minutes daily on these activities. Moreover, there was perfect congruency



between the time they believed was required and the time they were willing to allocate. However, reality did not live up to expressed desires. Survey #1 responses showed that almost sixty percent ( $n=4$ ) of respondents did not participate in what they felt were stress-relieving activities. Survey #2 revealed that ninety percent ( $n=9$ ) of participants gave 30 minutes or less to wellness activities, and forty percent ( $n=4$ ) said they did not feel they meaningfully participated in wellness activities over the semester. While activities with low time requirements, such as meditation and breathing exercises, were discussed in the mini-lesson, many participants were unwilling or unable to allocate the time they felt required to meet wellness needs.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

### **Understanding Stress**

Post-secondary organizations are adapting to view learners more holistically. Unfortunately, one of the catalysts for this is significant documented increases in student stress, anxiety and chronic illness (Beauchemin et al., 2018; Lisnyj et al., 2021). The participants in this study also expressed high levels of daily stress. More troubling is that many respondents viewed their stress levels as unacceptable. Overall, the study's findings were that of a population experiencing higher than desired stress levels which are in step with literature findings.

Many participants were unaware of organizational or municipal resources available to mitigate this stress. Including local wellness resources and theory on eustress may have proven fruitful as there was a change in self-reported stress levels between the first and second surveys, as demonstrated in Figure 1. The mini-lesson I provided explained eustress and the power of the mind-body connection. Keller et al. (2017) contend that stress only negatively impacts health if one believes that to be so. Therefore, helping students understand that the stress response can be beneficial to performance and helpful in pursuing goals is essential in creating healthy post-secondary environments. Throughout this program, I have come to appreciate stress as a motivator. Pressure drives us to be more social and resourceful, and despite occasional self-doubt, I believe we rarely take on more than we can handle.

### **Time Challenges**

Modern society is well versed in many aspects of wellness. Everyone knows they should be doing activities of some kind to promote at least physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. In addition, respondents expressed a desire to commit the necessary time to self-care and stress-relieving activities. It sounds like a recipe for success, right? Regrettably, almost none of the participants were able or willing to devote the time they said they needed to do this. My study's subjects are not unique in

this respect. For example, a 2012 project by Pelletier and Laska found that almost sixty percent of post-secondary participants experienced time constraints, and only thirty-seven percent felt they had a healthy life balance (p.5). As a result, wellness-promoting activities are being neglected in favour of other life priorities.

## **Different People, Different Priorities**

The concept of holistic wellness and health is still foreign to many. Holism is an approach that considers many aspects of wellness and encourages us to recognize that social, intellectual, physical and mental facets make up a whole person (Institute for Holistic Health Studies, 2018). The physical and mental aspects of health are rated as most important to participants; meanwhile, other dimensions are left to languish. For example, the social, cultural and environmental dimensions were voted at, or near, the bottom by respondents in Survey #1. However, Bogerd et al. (2018) tout an environment's stress-relieving and restorative power if they include greenery and other natural elements. The surveys identified many activities that respondents deemed helpful in combating stress, including walking, drawing, journaling, etc. The study results suggest that many activities can help promote wellness. Promoting a holistic approach is crucial and was one of the primary goals of my study's mini-lesson so that students could learn the importance of all the different facets of health. Ideally, students would have the opportunity to learn about these facets of health, assess themselves and then decide what area(s) they need to address to become dimensionally well. Then, individuals can select the activities best suited to their needs once these deficiencies and gaps are identified.

## **Classroom Power**

Post-secondary institutions typically provide wellness resources through adjacent services and departments. However, some have integrated wellness education into the curriculum and leveraged the classroom environment to deliver important wellness lessons and evidence-based strategies (Pociask et al., 2019). There are few, if any, settings where an individual can have the focus of students for a sustained period. In addition to this direct influence, activities promoting a group's overall wellness can create

connections, relationships and a sense of community that have lasting effects (Pociask et al., 2019, p. 98). Participants in my study believed that a classroom is a place where integrated wellness theory and resources would be helpful. Respondents expressed this despite the limited scope and contact provided in the study. I have seen this belief become a reality within my practice and instruction as learners receive embedded wellness and self-care activities within the curriculum and often express genuine thanks for their inclusion. Lastly, if finding time outside of school is problematic for learners, we should allocate it within class time. Organizations must include the classroom if we are genuinely committed to creating healthy environments.

## **Personal Perspective**

Historically, classrooms are instructor-centric environments. Instructors lecture and the learner is responsible for all else, including their wellbeing. Thus, the knowledge produced here by this study could be a part of the ultimate goal of situational improvement. Freire (as cited in Merriam & Bierema, 2014) describes a transformative process of using discussion and reflection to disrupt oppressive and disenfranchising structures (p.88). Admittedly, this process will be evolutionary, and it may take several cycles to find the most effective approaches to creating a classroom culture of caring. Ultimately, I see this instructor-led wellness initiative as possessing all the hallmarks of conscientization.

My work in this subject matter has just started. This research project has aimed to create positive change for student wellness. By bringing some new knowledge, and authentic enthusiasm, I feel confident that the types of theory and activities offered in this study can positively affect learners and faculty alike. People's health, places, and the planet are interconnected, and post-secondary institutions are responsible for positively impacting society (Dooris et al., 2020). So too, growth is most likely in a supportive environment with learners who are dimensionally well. Constructing this type of dynamic in a class requires an authentic presence that is sensitive and attentive to the individuals in front of you (Brewer & Watson, 2015). I will continue to promote this

message in my classes and disseminate it in other programs whenever I get the opportunity.

## **Conclusion: Now and the Future**

As a nurse with 20 years of frontline experience, I can speak firsthand to the ramifications of neglecting one's wellness. Life is unquestionably busy. With numerous demands requiring a slice of our days, how do we ensure wellness activities get the required minutes? Without dimensional health, we have nothing; therefore, wellness-promoting, stress-relieving activities should be prioritized above most others. More research is needed on why post-secondary students do not allocate the necessary time to wellness activities. Next, sharing wellness information and acquired wisdom should be a priority for educators and leaders with a platform to do so. Instructor-led wellness theory and stress-relieving initiatives can positively affect learners right now. Organizations are focusing time and money on creating new wellness policies and programming to serve students better. Unfortunately, not all learners are equally informed. The classroom provides the power to enlighten and inform right now! In addition, there is an opportunity to give the time and space required to start learners on a path to dimensional wellness. These practices do not need a massive time commitment. For example, guided meditation can take as little as five minutes to have significant stress-relieving effects.

I feel the materials used in this study have room to be expanded and refined to include information learners deem most necessary in future classroom visits. Standardizing these materials across more courses and conducting more evaluations around their usefulness could be the next step toward creating materials that could be embedded organization-wide. However, this type of action research takes a lot of time to implement correctly and would require significant release time for the individuals looking to continue this work. I genuinely feel this is a necessary step in creating the healthy environment that the literature alludes to so that we progress toward creating an organizational culture set on helping individuals enhance their dimensional wellbeing and achieve their full potential. Lastly, this study has enabled me to begin my journey to fulfill the idea of formalizing my curiosity (Hurstons as cited in O'Leary, 2017) and has

provided validity to my beliefs around wellness and self-care. Moving forward, I hope to become an ally to others in my organization who are promoting health and wellness and advancing wellness initiatives and policies.

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## Appendix A. Student Letter of Invitation

### Prioritizing **Health** and **Wellness** in Post-Secondary Classrooms:

#### An Invitation for College of New Caledonia Students



**Background and Purpose:** This study aims to understand CNC students' experiences with stress, health and wellness in the hope of integrating helpful wellness strategies into our classrooms.

I invite you to participate in a wellness lesson presented at the beginning of your semester, along with several health-promoting strategies. Two surveys will ask you questions about your feelings and actions that promote health and wellness at the semester's start and end. I am interested in knowing what you find most useful to maintain health and wellbeing during your educational experience to support your academic success.

The surveys will take approximately 5-10 minutes each. The initial theory will take around half an hour, and embedded wellness activities will take about 1-2 hours over the semester. Your instructor has agreed to provide class time to participate in this study.

If interested, click here! [Survey/Consent 1 Link](#)

Your participation is appreciated and entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at anytime! Once you have submitted your initial survey, your involvement in the activities mentioned earlier is assumed unless otherwise specified.

**The research team will abide by the latest provincial health guidelines in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and are fully vaccinated against COVID-19.**

## Appendix B. For Instructors and Administrators

### Prioritizing **Health** and **Wellness** in Post-Secondary Classrooms: An Invitation for CNC Instructors and Administrators



Dr. Michelle Pidgeon  
Site Sponsor  
Med Educational Leadership  
(Prince George, 2020-2022)  
Galleria 5 5216, 250-13450 102nd Ave., Surrey, BC, V3T 0A3

To Whom It May Concern,

Greetings. My name is Josh Staub. I teach Practical Nursing at the College of New Caledonia in Prince George. I am currently in year 1 of the Masters of Education in Leadership degree through Simon Fraser University. I am researching integrating health and wellness initiatives into post-secondary classrooms. The study commences under Dr. Michelle Pidgeon, Associate Dean, Indigeneity & Associate Professor, Faculty of Education.

#### **What is this project?**

This study, conducted at the College of New Caledonia, attempts to understand our learner's experiences with health, wellness and stress and determine the effect of integrated, facilitated wellness theory and surveys. Secondly, I am looking to establish a culture of caring by having instructors acknowledge the rigours of post-secondary learning and provide strategies for wellness. Lastly, I will seek to discover which wellness theory and tools are most helpful in reducing stress and improving the overall student experience. With the Healthy University

model as a guide, this input can support us in creating a better, healthier environment to support student success in academic and life endeavours.

If you would like your learners to have the opportunity to participate in this study, your learners will participate in 2 separate surveys, each taking approximately 5-10 minutes. They will be at semester beginning and end, and the survey will be a combination of multiple-choice and written answers. Health and wellness strategies and theories will be presented over a 40-minute mini-lesson.

<b>Intervention</b>	<b>Assessment</b>
Health and Wellness Mini-Lesson	Student Survey 1 & 2
Wellness Resources	Student Survey 2

### **Potential Risks**

This study is considered low-risk. If you notice signs of stress and burnout in your learners, I have included a list of resources that may be useful in this case that will be distributed to your learners in the first class. Additionally, I have linked CNC's [Thrive](#) program to refer a student to wellness services.

### **Potential Benefits**

This study aims to improve the student experience at CNC and beyond. Holistically well, students are more successful in academics and life. The data gained from this study could lead to embedded wellness theory that would benefit all CNC students.

### **Questions**

If you have questions, do not hesitate to reach out now or at any time during the study. You can also contact the researcher (Josh Staub) via email at [jrs14@sfu.ca](mailto:jrs14@sfu.ca) or by phone at 250-562-2131 ext.5267. You can also contact my supervisor, Dr.Michele Pidgeon, [michele\\_pidgeon@sfu.ca](mailto:michele_pidgeon@sfu.ca) or at 778-782-8609.

All the best,

Josh Staub, LPN/PID

[Survey/Consent 1 Link: Semester Start](#)  
[Survey/Consent 2 Link: Semester End](#)

The research team will abide by the latest provincial health guidelines in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and are fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

## Appendix C. Health and Wellness Resources



### At the College of New Caledonia

Resource	Contact Info
✚ Health & Wellness Center <a href="mailto:health@cnc.bc.ca">health@cnc.bc.ca</a>	250-562-2131 ext 5377 or
✚ Academic Advising <a href="mailto:advising@cnc.bc.ca">advising@cnc.bc.ca</a>	250-561-5818 or
✚ Counselling	250-562-2131 ext 5377
✚ Here2Talk	Toll free: 1-877-857-3397 anytime
✚ Aboriginal Resource Center(ARC) <a href="mailto:arc@cnc.bc.ca">arc@cnc.bc.ca</a>	250-562-2131 ext 5488 or
✚ Day Care	250-561-5834 or <a href="mailto:daycare@cnc.bc.ca">daycare@cnc.bc.ca</a>
✚ Recreation Services <a href="mailto:gym@cnc.bc.ca">gym@cnc.bc.ca</a>	250-562-2131 ext 5803 or
✚ Dental Services	250-561-5810
✚ Security	250-561-2131 ext 200
✚ Student Union	250-562-2131 ext 5852 or <a href="http://cncsu.ca">cncsu.ca</a>
✚ Financial Aid & Awards	250-561-5838 or <a href="mailto:fnaid@cnc.bc.ca">fnaid@cnc.bc.ca</a>

### Other Local, Provincial & Federal Resources

#### *Northern Health*

- ✚ [Link to Addictions, Acquired Brain Injury, Eating Disorders Clinic](#) [Northern Health](#)

#### *Mental Health*

- ✚ Canadian Mental Health Association 250-564-8644 or <https://northernbc.cmha.ca/>
- ✚ Foundry: Youth Mental Health Services 236-423-1571 or [Facebook](#)
- ✚ BC Schizophrenia Society 250-561-8033 or [bcsspg](#)

- ✚ BC Mental Health & Substance Use <http://www.bcmhsus.ca/>

## ***Counselling***

- ✚ Bedford Integrated Therapeutic Services 250-564-3034 or <https://bitsbc.com/>
- ✚ Northern Counselling & EDMR 250-596-8954 or <https://www.northerncounsellingemdr.com/>
- ✚ Barzzoni & Associates 250-614-2261 or <https://www.brazzoni.com/>
- ✚ Community Counselling Center 250-562-6690 or <https://www.communitycounsellingcentre.com>

## ***Meditation and Relaxation***

- ✚ Bedford Integrated Therapeutic Services (Float/Massage) 250-564-3034 or <https://bitsbc.com/>
- ✚ Relaxation Float Center 236-423-2294 or <https://www.reflexionfloat.com/>
- ✚ HML Wellness Solutions(Stress Management) 236-423-0077 or <https://www.hmlwellness.com/stress-management>
- ✚ Headspace Meditation & Sleep <https://www.headspace.com>

## ***Financial***


- ✚ Education Planner <https://educationplannerbc.ca/plan/finance/scholarship>
- ✚ Financial Help BC <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/post-secondary-education/international-education/study-abroad/financial-help>
- ✚ Student Aid BC <https://studentaidbc.ca/>
- ✚ Student Aid Canada <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/education/student-aid.html>
- ✚ You Need a Budget <https://www.youneedabudget.com>

## ***Fitness/Gyms***


- ✚ Sunset Studio Yoga <https://sunsetstudio.ca/>
- ✚ XConditioning 250-562-7664 or <https://www.xconditioning.com/>
- ✚ Anytime Fitness 250-596-1136 or <https://www.anytimefitness.com/>
- ✚ Angel's Aerial Fitness 250-640-4728 or <https://www.angelsaerial.com/>

## ***Other***

- ✚ Support PG Health & Wellness <https://www.supportpg.ca/health/>

 Recreation & Activities

<https://www.princegeorge.ca>

 **Emergency Numbers:** Suicide prevention, Addictions help, police & fire:  
<http://www.phsa.ca/emergency-numbers>

The research team will abide by the latest provincial health guidelines in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and are fully vaccinated against COVID-19.



## Appendix D. Proposed Study Activities

1. **PowerPoint Presentation\***: will be approximately 30-40 minutes in length and presented near the start of the semester. Themes will include:
  - i. Stress theory including signs and symptoms of chronic stress and burnout
  - ii. Eustress definition
  - iii. Mindfulness theory
  - iv. Meditation theory and tools
  - v. Self-care and reflective practices
  - vi. Introduction to the study aims and activities timeline
  - vii. Services available at CNC including distribution of Appendix CIf the presentation is being provided as a pre-recording it can be found here: <https://youtu.be/2K4IufK3QoQ>
  
2. **Online Surveys (x2)**:
  - i. [Survey/Consent 1 Link](#): Semester Start
  - ii. [Survey/Consent 2 Link](#): Semester End

\*the presentation may be conducted in person or online

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## Appendix E. Email Script

### In person facilitation

#### Survey #1

Hello! My name is Josh Staub. This email is a follow-up to the presentation recently facilitated in your \_\_\_\_\_ class. As previously mentioned, I am conducting a Master's level research study looking into the logistics of integrating health and wellness theory into CNC classrooms.

Your participation is appreciated and entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at anytime! Once you have submitted your initial survey, your involvement in the activities mentioned earlier is assumed unless otherwise specified. Read the intro page as part of the survey below and confirm your consent to participate. Non-participation will in no way affect your grades, and this will also remain confidential.

Each of the two surveys will take approximately 5-10 minutes. The initial theory will take approximately 30-40 minutes of existing class time. Time spent doing wellness activities is completely at your discretion. Please click on the link below to complete the survey!

Your information will be kept private and confidential. Additionally, you will remain anonymized in any material produced from this study.

This contact is coming to you from a 3<sup>rd</sup> party at CNC. If you have questions you **MUST** use the contact information below.

If you have any questions or would like more information, you may contact me, Josh Staub or my supervisor Dr. Michelle Pidgeon.

[Survey 1 Link](#): Semester Start

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## Survey #2

Hello! My name is Josh Staub. This email is a follow-up to the wellness activities facilitated in your \_\_\_\_\_ class. Thank you very much for your participation and efforts this past semester! As previously mentioned, I am conducting a Master's level research study looking into the logistics of integrating health and wellness theory into CNC classrooms.

Your participation is appreciated and entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at anytime! Read the intro page as part of the survey below and confirm your consent to participate. Non-participation will in no way affect your grades, and this will also remain confidential.

This final survey will take approximately 5-10 minutes. All individuals who have completed the required activities, including the surveys, for this study will be entered into a random draw for 3 wellness-related prizes worth roughly \$100 each! Winners will be contacted via provided email.

Your information will be kept private and confidential. Additionally, you will remain anonymized in any material produced from this study.

This contact is coming to you from a 3<sup>rd</sup> party at CNC. If you have questions you **MUST** use the contact information below.

If you have any questions or would like more information, you may contact me, Josh Staub or my supervisor Dr. Michelle Pidgeon.

[Survey 2 Link](#): Semester End

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## Email Script

### Pre-recorded Facilitation

#### Recorded Lesson & Survey #1

Hello! My name is Josh Staub. I am conducting a Master's level research study looking into the logistics of integrating health and wellness theory into CNC classrooms.

Your participation is appreciated and entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at anytime! Once you have submitted your initial survey, your involvement in the activities mentioned earlier is assumed unless otherwise specified. Read the intro page as part of the survey below and confirm your consent to participate. Non-participation will in no way affect your grades, and this will also remain confidential.

Each of the two surveys will take approximately 5-10 minutes. The initial theory will take approximately 30-40 minutes of existing class time. Time spent doing wellness activities is completely at your discretion. Please click on the link below to complete the survey!

Your information will be kept private and confidential. Additionally, you will remain anonymized in any material produced from this study.

This contact is coming to you from a 3<sup>rd</sup> party at CNC. If you have questions you **MUST** use the contact information below.

If you have any questions or would like more information, you may contact me, Josh Staub or my supervisor Dr. Michelle Pidgeon.

Pre-recorded Lesson Link: <https://youtu.be/2K4IufK3QoQ>

Then proceed to: [Survey 1 Link](#): Semester Start

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## Survey #2

Hello! My name is Josh Staub. This email is a follow-up to the wellness activities facilitated earlier this semester. Thank you very much for your participation and efforts this past semester! As previously mentioned, I am conducting a Master's level research study looking into the logistics of integrating health and wellness theory into CNC classrooms.

Your participation is appreciated and entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at anytime! Read the intro page as part of the survey below and confirm your consent to participate. Non-participation will in no way affect your grades, and this will also remain confidential.

This final survey will take approximately 5-10 minutes. All individuals who have completed the required activities, including the surveys, for this study will be entered into a random draw for 3 wellness-related prizes worth roughly \$100 each! Winners will be contacted via provided email.

Your information will be kept private and confidential. Additionally, you will remain anonymized in any material produced from this study.

This contact is coming to you from a 3<sup>rd</sup> party at CNC. If you have questions you **MUST** use the contact information below.

If you have any questions or would like more information, you may contact me, Josh Staub or my supervisor Dr. Michelle Pidgeon.

[Survey 2 Link](#): Semester End

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### **Participant mistakenly contacting 3<sup>rd</sup> party for information**

Hello. I have forwarded this query to the research team. You should hear back from them shortly. Please direct any future questions or concerns the emails provided or refer to your initial contact message.

If you have any questions or would like more information, you may contact me, Josh Staub or my supervisor Dr. Michelle Pidgeon.

The research team will abide by the latest provincial health guidelines in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and are fully vaccinated against COVID-19.