



Spas like Sunrise Springs in New Mexico, US, are addressing mental wellness

Ask an expert
Mental wellness

Spas are a natural place to focus on whole health – including mental wellness – but as more spas tackle the challenges of the mind, the question is: where do spas fit on the spectrum – and how deep should they go? We ask the experts

The World Health Organization reports that one in four people will be affected by mental or neurological disorders at some point in their lives, and that 450 million people are currently suffering from these conditions, placing mental disorders as one of the leading causes of ill-health and disability worldwide.

As we learn more about the mind/body connection, and as more research points to the ways in which traditional wellness activities such as meditation, yoga and good nutrition can support mental health, the spa industry is paying attention. These are, after all, some of

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the cornerstones of wellbeing and areas in which spas have long had expertise.

In addition, exercise has been shown to be more effective than drugs for treating mild to moderate depression, while research is emerging that links the gut biome to our mental health.

This broader view of mental wellbeing is opening up many new opportunities for spas

to support guests in achieving better mental health, and areas for spas to develop services.

There’s a wide range of approaches, from programmes that relieve stress to complex holistic offerings that help heal the body and the mind.

It’s certainly a hot topic; the Global Wellness Institute has started an initiative on mental wellness, and this year’s Global Wellness Summit has a strong focus on the subject. But what exactly do we mean by mental wellbeing – and where do spas fit in? Can spas tackle mental health and also offer luxury relaxation? And what do operators need to know to make sure they’re not getting out of their depth? We ask the experts.

Michael Schroeder program manager & lead counsellor, Sunrise Springs Spa Resort

At Sunrise Springs Spa Resort, we address mental health and wellness to the extent we deem appropriate for each guest. A readiness for mental health awareness can be likened to a guest's ability in a yoga class; the instructor needs to tailor a class so as to not overwhelm or push a guest beyond their comfort level.

Our life consultation and enhancement services are an important segment of our integrative spa menu, for it is from our mental health state and orientation to our world that all else flows. We have a package where guests can work with our medical director and myself to evaluate their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. We also offer animal interactions with our Silkie chickens and play



with our in-house puppies to create awarenesses for our guests, and to have a bit of fun. Some of the classes we offer in expressive arts, movement and meditation create opportunities for heightened awareness and clarity. We also offer one-on-one, couples' and group counselling.

All of the research and data about wellness tourism points to the growing interest in wellness-related travel experiences, with

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mental health being an important area of interest.

Based on the growing global epidemics of stress, lack of sleep and overexposure to electronic devices, it makes sense for spas to look at how they can incorporate mental wellness interventions into their services.

But spas must be prepared to address the fact that the underpinnings of our mental states run deep; guests must feel safe in their environment, and be able to easily 'surface' from the counselling process. There must be adequate space and time for reflection, and staff must be able to assess guests' needs. Specific

training is recommended for staff members who are involved with delivering mental health services.

Although wellness travellers are seeking a one-stop approach to their health needs, training and oversight are required to address the mental health elements.

Some spas are forging relationships with outside medical facilities who are experts in this arena and collaborating on guest care.

The growing interest in mental wellness services represents an opportunity for spas to offer higher levels of care while also increasing revenue.

Dr Fikry Isaac founder and CEO, WellWorld Consulting

I worked as vice president of global health services for Johnson & Johnson for 15 years, and caring for the employees was a key priority, not because it was the right thing to do, but because it created a competitive advantage - offering mental wellness programmes and services was critical to business success. Business leaders in many organisations now recognise that good health equals good business, and that there is no health without mental health.

The traditional role of spas is changing as consumers demand more holistic approaches to their wellbeing, and spas can - and should - transform their ways of thinking to meet these



demands. Addressing mental wellness in a spa setting is a must; beyond the traditional modalities, programmes that combine physical, mental and spiritual components can lead to positive outcomes.

The biggest challenge for spas is to change their own mindsets from being a place for relaxation to a place

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where people can seek more tranquility with their own wellbeing. People will come to spas to focus on mental wellness in part because it eliminates the stigma of mental illness, and focuses more on mental wellness.

Spas that want to offer mental wellness services would need more specialised staff with extensive training, and will need to be connected directly to mental health medical providers in the event that guests need to be referred on to specialists. While mental illness requires specialised medical

attention from diagnosis to treatment, spas can play a bigger role in supporting the medical community and supplementing clinical care - and an even a bigger role in reducing stress and enhancing mental wellbeing.

Mental wellness will be a necessity as we move into the future. Living well will require a major shift in the way our well-care ecosystem operates. The spa world will be part of the solution, but will need to transform its service delivery and its definition of wellness - including mental wellness. ▶