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THE HEALTH CARE HAPPINESS FACTOR

Health and general wellbeing are high priorities in our society. We are regularly regaled with a surfeit of reports, including the many published each year by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, and its comprehensive biennial tome — *Australia's health*. Our state and territory health departments also publish annual reports on the health of their residents and the performance of their health care systems. Not to be outdone, the World Health Organization has its own *World health reports*.

There is also an international group of health care observers supported by the New York-based Commonwealth Fund, which regularly reports on a series of quality indicators reflecting medical care in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Germany and the United States. These reports are reminiscent of a horse race, as each country vies for top billing in the categories of quality of care, access, efficiency, equity, and healthy lives, and the prestigious overall ranking.

However, in all these reports there is one vital item missing: the happiness factor — an indicator measuring the overall happiness of doctors and other professionals working in our health care systems.

To some this may seem frivolous. But surely the happiness of workers is a crucial determinant of quality outcomes? Indeed, as Edward C Rosenow III, an American physician, notes in *The art of living ... the art of medicine*:

Happy people are flexible, unassuming, able to feel deeply; they have a passion and move through life with a grace, an elegance, a warmth. And most have a sense of purpose in life.

Sadly, some would say that happiness in health care has now reached rock bottom, and it is baffling that this state of affairs does not command attention in the discourse on health care quality and safety. Surely it's time that the importance of health care happiness is acknowledged, and the happiness fact or measured and regularly reported.



Martin B Van Der Weyden

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Cover: Dysplastic naevi (1a, 1b) are a major risk factor for melanoma (2a, 2b).