

A Perspective on Wellness: Personal Reflections from an Active Member of Multiple National Forensic Organizations

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In August of 1988, the first Developmental Conference on Individual Events was held at the Executive Tower Inn, in Denver, Colorado. The conference was attended by approximately eighty forensic professionals from twenty-five different states. Conference participants presented papers related to numerous topic areas ranging from forensic pedagogy to definitions and practices in forensic events and competition. However, the authors of one position paper had little knowledge at the time that their paper would be the beginning of a movement in forensics that is still drawing attention today. Their paper, entitled "Integrating Wellness and Forensics: Tournament Management as a Starting Point" presented the forensic community with material related to the wellness of participants as well as the activity of forensics. The paper, later published in the conference proceedings, concluded with suggestions and challenges to the forensics community. (Hatfield, Hatfield and Carver, 1989)

It is with a review of that paper, that I approached the status of wellness as it has been considered by two of the national speech organizations with which I have been affiliated. As a long-time member of both the AFA-NIET and NFA, I thought it would be worthwhile to examine the recommendations contained in the Hatfield, Hatfield, and Carver paper in light of actions that have been taken by either or both of these two national organizations.

One of the first items mentioned in the paper was the consideration of the length of the tournament season as well as the number of tournaments that are scheduled. Sound familiar? There have been numerous discussions on the IE-List Serve as well as at many forensics tournaments on that very topic. The presenters in 1988 suggested that an obvious solution would simply be to hold fewer tournaments. Has this happened? I am afraid not. An examination of the current tournament calendars published by either AFA or NFA clearly reveals that the number of tournaments has actually increased, with more of them now taking place also on a Sunday. However, both AFA and NFA have contributed to the shortening of the forensic season by moving their respective tournament dates a week earlier in the season than when they first originated. The Interstate Oratorical Association has also joined this movement by scheduling its tournament in the last weekend in April rather than the first weekend in May.

Additional changes made by the AFA-NIET and NFA have included revision of the schedule of their respective tournaments in consideration of wellness factors. In past years, the business meetings for both coaches and students held during the NFA were conducted during the evening of one of the days of competition. These meetings would often last for hours, running very late into the evening, with competition starting very early the next day. That has been changed. The NFA business meetings are now scheduled in the early afternoon, during a break period between rounds of Lincoln-Douglas Debate and Individual

Events. This change has created a more human approach that gives both students and coaches time to eat lunch, participate in the business meeting, and still maintain a reasonable time schedule for competition for that day of the tournament. The AFA-NIET has also changed its meeting for the national committee to be held on the day prior to the start of the tournament, instead of happening at the same time as events on the first day of the tournament. Both of these changes have contributed to the wellness of participants in terms of less stress and better use of time.

The times of the individual rounds have also been an item of concern. With the number of students double-entered, and at the NFA Tournament, possibly triple entered, trying to have rounds scheduled on the basis of one hour and fifteen minutes per round proved to be a source of stress, in addition to inhibiting opportunities for getting something to eat or drink. Both of these national organizations have moved to increase the time frame for rounds to an hour and a half, allowing needed time between rounds. Both AFA and NFA have held to a schedule that does not start rounds before 8:00 a.m.

In 1997 during the national committee meeting for the AFA-NIET at the University of Texas, Arlington, wellness issues occupied a considerable amount of time and discussion. An outgrowth of that discussion, was the creation and approval of a set of guidelines for tournament directors designed to increase the wellness of forensic competition.

Both the AFA and NFA recognize that they do not have the authority to impose regulations on forensic programs, especially since many programs do not affiliate with either of these two national organizations. The AFA and NFA can only regulate and enforce rules that affect their own national tournaments. They have, however, put forth suggestions for the forensic community at-large to consider with the hope that individual program and tournament directors will consider them in the management of their respective programs and tournaments.

Much can be said about wellness initiatives. True wellness in relationship to forensics will only be achieved if each of us gives it the attention that it deserves. There are questions and concerns that still need to be addressed. One of those is the definition of wellness itself. Should it be defined in terms of the physical health of each individual, the mental health of each individual, or both? Or should we even make these distinctions? Can wellness be linked to the diversity of the participants in the activity or the diversity of the activity itself? Is there a link between wellness and the pedagogical and competitive mood of the activity? Should it be defined in terms of the activity itself, what activities contribute to wellness and which do not? How can the wellness of the activity be addressed in a manner that still allows for programs to meet their goals and expectations? Should the Council of Forensic Organizations play a larger role in the establishment of guidelines or even regulations that would promote wellness in forensics?

These are not easy questions to answer. They all involve issues with ethical concerns and ultimately must be approached by directors, coaches, judges and student participants in the choices made by each as they participate in foren-

sics. However, one thing is clear. The choice must be made to promote wellness. The activity and those that participate must become more aware of the positive elements of a well and healthy approach if the activity and participants are to continue to grow in a productive manner. This special journal issue is a positive step in that direction. Just as a conference paper presented in 1988 began the process of examination, let us hope that this issue of the *National Forensic Journal* will continue that dialogue.

References

Hatfield, S., Hatfield, T., & Carver, C. (1989) Integrating wellness and forensics: Tournament management as a starting point. In L. Schnoor and V. Karns (Eds.) Proceedings of the First Developmental Conference on Individual Events, pp. 26-29.