



e-quilibrium

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Doin' Stuff

Apparently at a time when he was experiencing some existential angst, Ziggy (Tom Wilson's cartoon character) consults a sage. The exchange goes as follows:

Ziggy: "Tell me old wise one... what is the meaning of life?"

Old Wise One: "Ah yesss... the meaning of life... life, my boy, is DOIN' STUFF!!"

Ziggy: "Life is 'DOIN' STUFF'???" ... "That's it???"

Old Wise One: "... as opposed to death, which is NOT doin' stuff!!"

Ziggy: (walking away) "... it's a more elementary theory than I had expected, but one you can't argue with!"

Robert Kaplan, a UCLA psychologist, used the "Ziggy Theorem" over 15 years ago with reference to the goal of health care: to help people live longer and to enhance the quality of life in the years before death. Kaplan has been a leader in the measurement of health outcomes, particularly in the development of the QALY (quality-adjusted life year), an index which is now widely used in determining the cost-effectiveness of health interventions and initiatives. One very important way to determine the effectiveness of a treatment for a health problem is the extent to which the patient is able to be "doin' more stuff" than was the case prior to the treatment.

Of course, what "stuff" a person is "doin'" matters with respect to health. "Use it or lose it" has been established as an accurate depiction of what occurs over time with physical and cognitive function. Generally speaking, our bodies and minds are designed to be "doin' stuff" that is more active than passive.

Staying active is one of the important ways to attenuate the gradual functional decline that often accompanies chronic illness. Many people would suggest that ideal aging consists of the maintenance of a high level of function and quality of life right up until the point of death.

Indeed, a person may at times be “overdoin’ it” but that’s a topic for another article. Not having “stuff” to do is quite an unpleasant state to be in. Neither boredom nor the inability to function is a satisfying condition. Sensory deprivation experiments, in which persons have been deprived of any form of stimulation or activity, are experienced as torturous when sustained for any length time.

Next time you think about how you have “stuff” to do, you might remind yourself that this is a good thing. Life is the ability to be “doin’ stuff.” According to the Ziggy Theorem, it’s the purpose of life.

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