

# ★WELCOA's News & Views

## The **Evolution** and **Dilution** of Wellness Coaching

The Value of Coaching  
in Today's Industry

A WELCOA Expert Interview with Dr. Michael Arloski

PART 1

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## The Evolution and Dilution of Wellness Coaching: The Value of Coaching in Today's Industry

(PART 1)

An Expert Interview with  
**MICHAEL ARLOSKI**

### ABOUT **MICHAEL ARLOSKI, PHD, PCC, CWP**



Michael Arloski, Ph.D., PCC, CWP, is a licensed psychologist, Professional Certified Coach (ICF) and a Certified Wellness Practitioner. Founder and CEO of Real Balance Global Wellness Services, Inc. ([www.realbalance.com](http://www.realbalance.com)), his company has trained thousands of health and wellness coaches around the world. Dr. Arloski's perspective on wellness coaching comes from his pioneering work training wellness and health coaches, authoring the field's foundational book *Wellness Coaching For Lasting Lifestyle Change*, and serving as an Executive Committee member of The National Consortium for Credentialing Health & Wellness Coaches. A member of the Board of Directors of The National Wellness Institute he has also served as President of The Ohio Society For Behavioral Health.

Professionally contributing to the field of wellness since 1979 Dr. Michael Arloski is a thinker who synthesizes wellness down to what really works. Continually working to help people find ways to improve their lifestyles, he has presented at the National Wellness Conference over thirty times, and has keynoted and presented on wellness on four continents. Michael's mission is to build allies for a healthy world across the globe.

Michael and his wife, Deborah, work, live and play together in Fort Collins, Colorado.

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### ABOUT **RYAN PICARELLA, MS, SPHR**



As WELCOA's President, Ryan brings immense knowledge and insight from his career that spans over a decade in the health and wellness industry. He is a national speaker, healthcare consultant, and has designed and executed award winning wellness programs. Known for his innovative and pragmatic approach to worksite wellness, Ryan looks forward to furthering the WELCOA mission and vision and continuing to position the organization for success for the future.

Ryan Picarella can be reached at [rpicarella@welcoa.org](mailto:rpicarella@welcoa.org).

In Part 1 of this 2-part interview with Michael Arloski, Ph.D., PCC, a founding father in the field of wellness coaching, Michael discusses the evolution of health and wellness coaching, the highs and lows for how it is currently being leveraged and opportunities the field has to be successful in the future. Read on to learn about what the potential barriers might be for coaching in today's market.



**Q1** Michael, thank you so much for sitting down with me today. My main goal for today is to understand the evolution of health coaching. What, if anything, has changed about health coaching over the last five to ten years?

**Michael Arloski:** Oh, plenty has changed. We have seen tremendous growth in the entire field of health and wellness coaching. And by the way, I use the terms “health coaching” and “wellness coaching” interchangeably. I am fond of “wellness coaching” as a term, but we decided quite a while ago that the two terms are used pretty interchangeably.

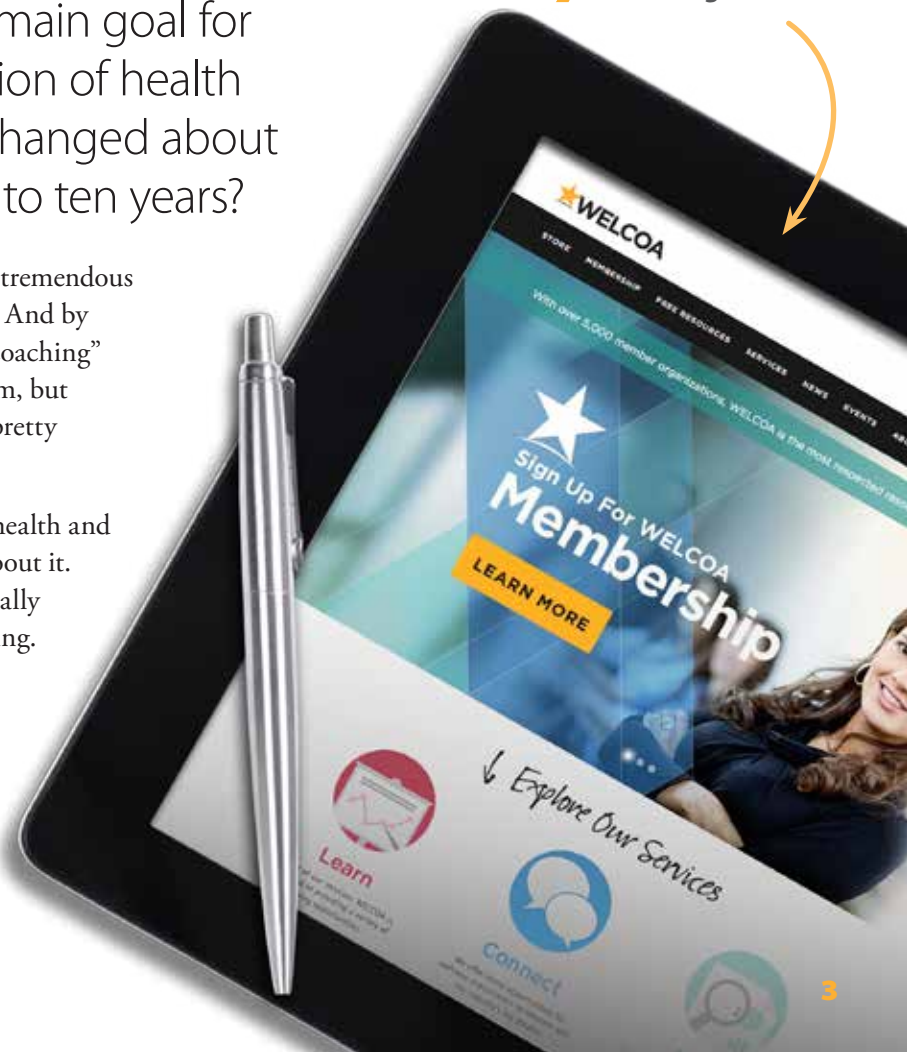
First of all, there has been a ten-fold growth in the use of health and wellness coaching and the amount of research out there about it. And the vast majority of that research is showing that it really does work. It really is effective. That has been very validating.

We have known that it works from our own experience in the field, but in the last ten years there has been a tremendous surge in research. That is really encouraging.

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**Q2** How has wellness coaching as a practice changed? Do you think we are just getting better at capturing the successes that we have had over the last five to ten years? Or do you think that we have just become better health coaches over the last five to ten years?

**MA:** I would say that as wellness coaching has made its mark, the research is starting to catch up with it. To give you an idea of what a new field this is, the International Coaching Federation was only just founded in 1996, and the health and wellness focus really started to be an important topic by the late '90's. Disease management companies may have been earlier than that; however, at the time, we would not have called their services "coaching". Today, Disease Management services include a true coaching component as well as medical compliance products. The whole field is starting to catch up with itself.

I think academic studies are always slow to arrive. There are not many health and wellness coaching departments in the universities. So you do not have as many people involved directly doing research in their own field. It has to come from a wide variety of other fields. Yet, this is all changing. The federal government is even funding research in this area now, spurred on by the Affordable Care Act. Much of the evidence really resides in the proprietary research done by large companies in the disease management and insurance industries. They have powerful evidence of effectiveness and we're starting to see more sharing. A great collection of evidence can be found in the literature review, *A Systematic Review of the Literature on Health and Wellness Coaching: Defining a Key Behavioral Intervention in Healthcare*.<sup>1</sup>

We have been seeing psychologists, nurses, physicians, pharmacists, and all sorts of people putting wellness coaching into practice with extraordinary implication. Not just in prevention, but also in the whole lifestyle medicine arena showing that it really helps to have an ally to increase your chances of success at lifestyle improvement. And of course, there is a ton of evidence that lifestyle effects the course of an illness. So today, most coaches are working with people that do have health challenges.

“Today, Disease Management services include a true coaching component as well as medical compliance products. **The whole field is starting to catch up with itself.**”

<sup>1</sup> Wolever, R.Q., Simmons, L.A., Sforzo, G.A., Dill, Diana, Kaye, Miranda, PhD, Bechard, E.M., BA, Southard, M.E., Kennedy, M., Vosloo, J. PhD, Yang, N. "A Systematic Review of the Literature on Health and Wellness Coaching: Defining a Key Behavioral Intervention in Healthcare." *Global Advances In Health And Medicine* Volume 2, Number 4 July 2013. [www.gahmj.com](http://www.gahmj.com).





**Q3** What are some specific ways that you have seen the industry evolve over the last 5 to 10 years?

**MA:** One of the biggest ways it has evolved is in the use of health and wellness coaching within employee wellness programs, hospital wellness programs, insurance companies and even in medical settings. There is more use of coaches to help people with existing health challenges to use lifestyle improvement to improve their condition and overall well being. There are more academic programs involved now, nursing programs, health promotion and fitness programs. They are all looking at how they can integrate coaching into the curriculum. Simultaneously, I would say another thing that has evolved is a real dilution of wellness coach-training in the marketplace with many different training companies throwing their hat in the ring. Some of those companies seem to be doing wonderful programs, and some of them are offering pretty low quality training. So that is all happening at the same time.

At the same time, I would say a wonderful piece of the evolution of wellness coaching is a real effort to help this profession grow up; there are very serious professional efforts underway to establish standards in credentialing. That is the work that I have been doing as an executive committee member and a founding member of the National Consortium for Credentialing Health and Wellness Coaches or NCCHWC.org. We want to compare apples and apples when promoting wellness coaching and when researching the benefits.

**Q4** Do you see more changes on the horizon given the new developments and some of the stronger credentials in place like the one you just mentioned? Do you see more changes or just a growth in the profession as a whole?

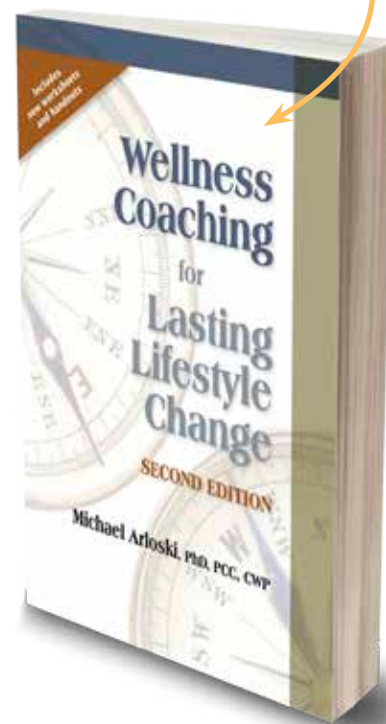
**MA:** I see changes in the industry and growth in the profession. My hope is that we are going to succeed with the establishment of higher quality standards, levels of competency and credentialing so the clients know that they are working with good quality coaches. My fear is that, at the same time, wellness coaching will continue to be the preferred product utilized by the organizations that are doing their best to offer the bare minimum in programming while still showing some kind of results. My concern is that if that happens, people may have poor experiences with coaching and not think very well of it. It's all forcing us to develop best practices in program delivery.

I think the other thing that we are going to be seeing is more of an embrace of wellness coaching by the general public as they start to become aware of its value. To compare wellness coaching to the growth of another profession, thirty to forty years ago hardly anyone could tell you what a fitness trainer did or what value they would have for them.

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Check out  
Michael Arloski's book,  
*Wellness Coaching for Lasting  
Lifestyle Change (second edition)*

To purchase, visit:  
[wholeperson.com/store/  
michael-arloski.shtml](http://wholeperson.com/store/michael-arloski.shtml)



And today, of course, fitness training is a well-recognized profession that people know about and know how to utilize.

So I am hoping that we are going to see more and more awareness of wellness coaching. Especially as it is more and more frequently provided as part of one's benefits. Even insurance companies are offering it as not just a cost containment strategy, but as a perk as they work to attract customers.

**Q5** Great! Let us move on and talk about current practices. What health coaching modality works best? How has current technology changed the role of health coaches?

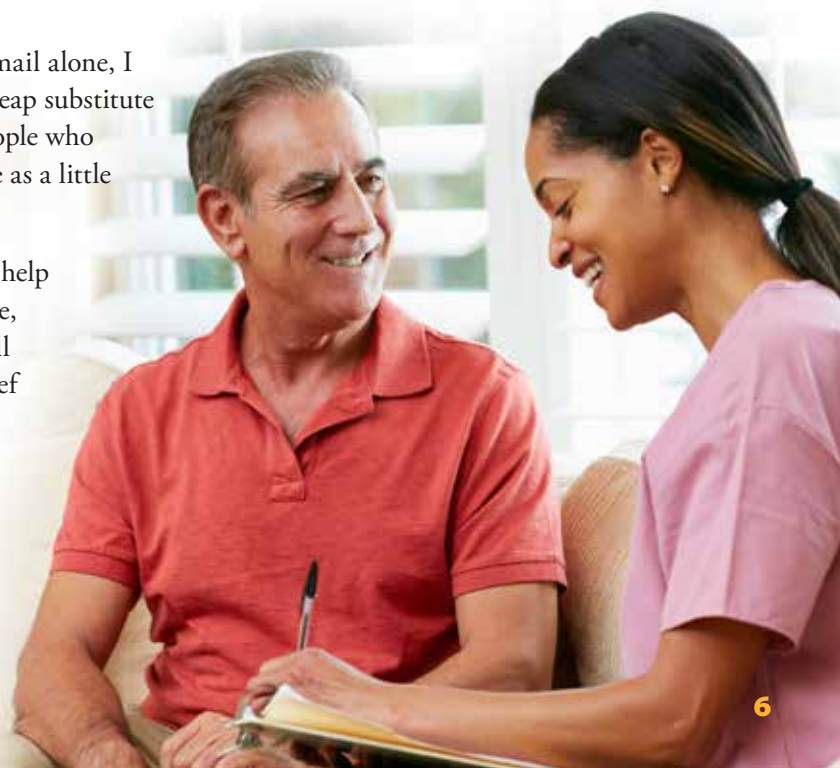
**MA:** There is no doubt that “High Touch” wellness coaching using a focused methodology or process works best. For most folks dealing with real barriers to change that they encounter in their lives, you really cannot substitute the real coaching alliance with a real live human being. Sessions can be done face-to-face or telephonically. Telephonic is actually a lot more effective than people think. The vast majority of coaching is done telephonically. And on the dimension of self-disclosure, it is even more effective. Self-disclosure seems to be even a little easier for people over the phone. We are seeing a blend of human interaction with texting, email and other technologies used to remind, track and nudge. For some, a text message may be all they need. James Prochaska and his people have done some good work on showing that in some cases that may be adequate.

**Q6** What about email coaching and other coaching via electronic platforms?

**MA:** In terms of what we call asynchronous coaching or just email alone, I think that is an inadequate approach in many cases. It is the cheap substitute you might say—better than nothing. Maybe there are some people who only need email alone once coaching is established, just to serve as a little reminder.

One of the things that technology will never be able to do is to help people deal with the emotional component of behavioral change, which is 60 percent of the picture. Or to help them deal with all the barriers that are both internal and external—their own belief systems, their self-efficacy levels, their self-esteem, and all the barriers that they encounter interpersonally, at the work place, and the family. That is way beyond technology. That is where we have to have high tech and high touch.

“For most folks dealing with real barriers to change that they encounter in their lives, you really **cannot substitute the real coaching alliance** with a real live human being.”



**Q7** Have you seen any of the groups you have worked with try video health coaching?

**MA:** I think video coaching can work very well using Skype and modalities like that. It has to be, I think, just as effective as telephonic and even a little better because you are able to see each other. You are able to see at least facial expression change and that kind of thing. It is definitely more personal than just the telephone call.

**Q8** Let's briefly talk about the future of health coaching. What do you think are some of the biggest obstacles you see for health coaching to be effective?

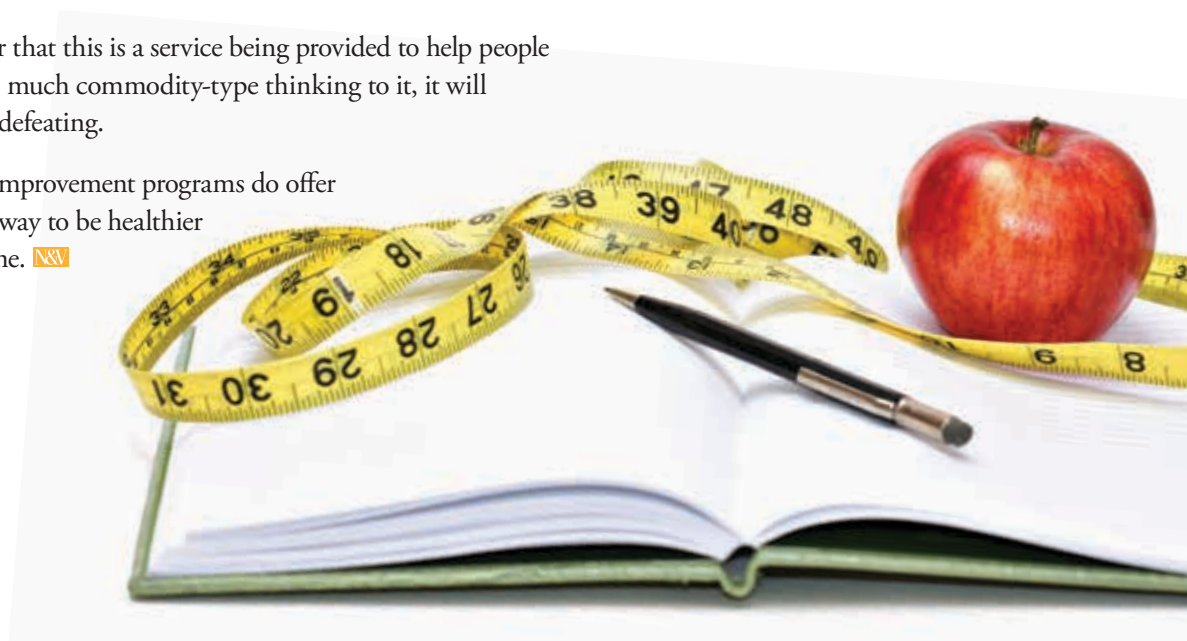
**MA:** A great challenge to health & wellness coaching programs going forward is balancing quality with economics. One major barrier or obstacle is inadequate training of coaches. Sometimes, coaches are thrown out there with very little training and expected to do the job. They often get more training later on. Sometimes, they are equipped with only a very limited skill set like some pieces from cognitive behavioral therapy or perhaps nothing but motivational interviewing. And while that is a great counseling style for resolving ambivalence, it is not an entire coaching methodology. Wellness coaches and programs need a clear methodology that allows clients to co-create with their coach a lifestyle change process that works for them.

The other big obstacle our industry faces, as I alluded to earlier, is the commoditization of wellness coaching. If we deal with coaching simply as a product, we are applying the wrong model. We attempt sometimes to oversimplify it by reducing quality and quantity of how much is offered down to a bare minimum. And yet, we are still expecting great results in a very complex thing called changing human behavior.

I think we have to really remember that this is a service being provided to help people improve their lives. If we apply too much commodity-type thinking to it, it will reduce its effectiveness and be self-defeating.

That being said, effective lifestyle improvement programs do offer individuals and companies a clear way to be healthier while holding down the bottom line. **N&V**

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