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Mr. Wuttke

Spas, Health & Fitness

Do Spas Need to Be Healthy?

By [Mark Wuttke](#), Principal, The Wuttke Group

The range of products, services and treatments that are part of the spa industry has proliferated from the early days of spa which focused on "taking the waters" – bathing in mineral baths, hot springs and other natural forms of hydrotherapy. The evolution has taken the connotation of spa to everything from "fat farm", to a place where the rich go to pamper themselves or recover from plastic surgery, to more spartan environments geared to the spa-goer's inner ascetic. To complicate matters, many hair and nail salons have added or repurposed a room, installed a therapist, and rebranded themselves as "day spas".

The amenity spa, attached to a hotel or resort, is today considered mainstream in terms of environment and spa menu. This category holds the greatest potential for future growth and, along with it, a responsibility to serve as steward of the spa ethos. So how will this segment define spa going forward?

In recent years, the great overlay to spas of all descriptions has been the notion of Wellness (with a capital W). Following on the heels of the green movement over the past decade, Wellness has become the buzzword in many spas, as well as fitness facilities, restaurants, and other businesses (including entire hotels) that position themselves as champions of healthy living and lifestyle.

The movement is so significant that prognosticators have dubbed Wellness the next trillion-dollar industry. But is every product and process on the Wellness bandwagon healthy? And to what extent can you determine or influence the Wellness movement through your spa operation? Let's take a conscious step back and reflect on the true meaning of the word so we can accurately evaluate the broad range of Wellness claims out in the marketplace and for you to determine where your spa sits on the Wellness spectrum.

Here are two definitions of Wellness:

1. The quality or state of being healthy in body and mind, especially as the result of deliberate effort, and an approach to healthcare that emphasizes preventing illness and prolonging life, as opposed to emphasizing treating diseases. www.dictionary.com
2. The condition of good physical and mental health, especially when actively maintained by proper diet, exercise, and avoidance of risky behavior. American Heritage Dictionary

Is it desirable for a spa to be healthy? That depends on who you ask. Some spa-goers say "Yes, definitely". Others say that it doesn't really matter as long as they look and feel good



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after the service. In short, the success of a wellness experience is defined by how the guests feel. So from an operator's perspective, does it matter?

The answer to that question begins and ends with what your spa means to your hotel or resort brand. Initial considerations are:

- How does the spa fit into the entire operation? Is it aligned with the host hotel or resort in terms of guest profile, theme,

décor, services, retail products and other offerings?

- If part of a larger hospitality organization, how well does it fit within corporate brand guidelines?
- What is the property's responsibility to the guest? Is it to anticipate and meet the guest's existing needs? Is it to inspire and/or educate the guest?
- To what extent should the property mirror the personal values of the guest?
- What complement of spa treatments, services, food and beverage and retail offerings will bring the greatest return on investment and positive impact on the bottom line?

Is Your Spa Offering "Unhealthy Wellness"?

With this understanding, I would urge spa owners and operators to educate themselves on the science behind the products and services currently offered in spas, particularly if the spa's theme revolves around a brand promise of Wellness. Failing to do so may result in spa offerings that teeter on the brink of what I call "unhealthy wellness".

As an example, let's look at some of the treatments that are currently promoted as or used in conjunction with the concept of Wellness in some spas and salons. As you read each of the following activities and or procedures, ask yourself if it fits the definition of Wellness or unhealthy wellness:

- **Botox (onabotulinumtoxinA):** Also called botulinum toxin type A, Botox is made from the bacteria that causes botulism. Botulinum toxin blocks nerve activity in the muscles, causing a temporary reduction in muscle activity. The substance is widely used today to temporarily lessen the appearance of facial wrinkles. Not as well known is that the botulinum toxin contained in Botox can spread to other body areas beyond where it was injected. This can cause serious and even life-threatening side effects in some people receiving botulinum toxin injections, even for cosmetic purposes. www.drugs.com .
- **Cosmetics, Skin Care and Body Care Products:** Synthetic and natural products used in spa treatments may contain toxic ingredients suspected of causing cancer, reproductive harm, and other adverse health effects. Some of the questionable ingredients commonly found in personal care products include: Parabens, Propylene Glycol, Sodium Laureth Sulphate, Phthalates, Nanoparticles, DEA/TEA,MEA, Coal Tar Derivatives, Formaldehyde/Formaldehyde Donors, Hydroquinone, BHA, Octoxnols, and Ethel Acetate. www.safecosmetics.org
- **Tanning Beds:** Tanning beds are thought to emit ultraviolet radiation several times higher than one receives from the sun. Appealing to some guests seeking that "healthy glow", many studies indicate that tanning bed use can result in increased incidence of premature skin aging and the development of skin cancers, especially melanoma, which is potentially deadly. According to the National Cancer Institute, female tanning bed users are 55 percent more likely to develop malignant melanoma. www.cancer.gov
- **Chemical Peels:** Used to peel away surface skin, chemical peels are used to improve the appearance of sunspots, revealing fresh, healthy looking skin below. However, use of these chemicals has been known to cause complications like burning, scarring, hyper-pigmentation, hypo-pigmentation, and skin eruptions.

These examples fit my category of "unhealthy wellness" because they are often erroneously marketed under the Wellness umbrella. If the market for your spa demands the type of treatments listed above, my recommendation would be to brand the spa under an umbrella other than Wellness, or better yet, consider making a conscious decision to give the guest something healthier than what they think they want.



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By Paul Feeney, President, Sanford Rose Associates

The Case for Healthy Wellness

If you, like me, believe that a spa is meant to be a place of health, well being and healing, why do some spas offer unhealthy treatments and services? Very often when confronted, the answer is: "I am just giving the guests what they want".

Yet, in many cases, when the guest crosses the threshold into a spa, she or he assumes that the operator has done due diligence on the health benefits of treatments and services offered. When a spa makes a compromise to satisfy guest demands, is the spa compromising integrity? Is there a better way to operate?

Because a spa – particularly in a hotel or resort -- is regarded as offering a blend of hospitality and health care, it should be the spa operator's role to act in the best interests of the guest's health and wellbeing. The high road taken is make decisions and offer services that accomplish the fundamental purpose of the spa profession, which is to create an environment of educating guests to help them make wise and healthy choices for their body and our environment.



Travaasa, Austin

Here are a few great tips toward operating a spa in the spirit of healthy wellness

- Offer certified whole natural and/or organic skin care and body care products free of synthetic isolated chemicals produced in laboratories. An example of this can be found in the spas at Travaasa Experiential Resorts which sit atop precious lands in Hawaii. Says Spa Director Maggie Wagner: "We have such a strong commitment to sustainability, and a very strong sense of place, that we would never consider anything but organic products for our skin care lines."



One such line used in their spas is Amala, a certified natural and organic skincare line that is produced in a zero-carbon-footprint plant That's brand alignment.

- Create a wholesome food menu featuring a majority of items that are local, fresh, organic,

and vegetarian. destination spa in Baja California, Mexico, was born out of a commitment to this principle in 1940 and still models it today.



- Provide freshly made organic juices, teas, and infused filtered waters within the spa environment. Travaasa and Rancho La Puerta are among the growing number of spas that provide healthy refreshments for guests within their spas, most likely influencing their guests to prepare those same beverages once they return home, a reminder of their spa experience.
- Develop the best possible complement of treatments, services and retail products and price them accordingly so your spa can be sustainable from both a physical and fiscal health perspective.
- Hiring, training, incentivizing and compensating the best possible staff is key, especially in an industry where growing demand outpaces the supply of qualified spa professionals. But if you operate your spa on the highest of principals, you will attract the best and the brightest the true Wellness industry has to offer.

Mark Wuttke heads Wuttke Group, LLC, a world-class business development consultancy specializing in natural, organic and sustainable spa and boutique retail with an emphasis on the luxury market. He and his colleagues have assisted more than 15 natural and organic brands globally in their quest to attain and sustain authenticity. Mr. Wuttke's current involvement includes worldwide market development and distribution for two Germany-based award-winning personal care product lines – Amala and Primavera. Wuttke's experience includes 19 years as President/CEO in the USA and Australia within the wellness industry and more than 25 years of strategic and tactical management experience in operations, marketing and sales. He has been associated with luxury spas and high end boutique retail, specializing in biodynamic/organic skin care and natural medicines. Mr. Wuttke is often tapped by the media for his expertise and he is currently on the Editorial Advisory Board of Organic Spa Magazine, for which he authors an ongoing column called Stewardship. Mr. Wuttke can be contacted at 404-441-4962 or info@wuttkegroup.com [Extended Bio...](#)

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