

Case Study

Rural health system partners with local fitness centers and small businesses to improve workplace wellness

Abstract

When their most recent Community Health Needs Assessment revealed Henderson, Neb., and surrounding areas needed a greater focus on fitness and nutrition, leadership at Henderson Health Care Services began their search for ways to provide more wellness opportunities where people live, work and play. As part of this initiative, the rural health system, which comprises a critical access hospital, primary care, specialty clinics and more, launched a workplace wellness program for local small businesses in September 2015. The program, called Body @ Work, promotes healthy lifestyle choices, provides blood pressure checks at the workplace and offers employees discounted fitness facility memberships in partnership with two local fitness centers. Partnerships remain strong with the eight participating businesses.

Opportunity

Obesity, nutrition and physical activity were listed as areas of concern for Henderson, Neb., in its 2015 Community Health Needs Assessment. With numerous small businesses in the area, leadership and staff at Henderson Health Care Services recognized the opportunity to expand their reach and impact on population health by promoting and inspiring health and fitness in local workplaces. Hospital leadership responded by building partnerships with local fitness centers and small businesses to offer wellness education, lower-cost access to fitness facilities, and other wellness and preventive care opportunities through a program called Body @ Work.

Available at no charge to local small businesses, Body @ Work provides employees at participating companies with monthly newsletters covering a wide range of health, wellness and fitness topics, and discounted gym memberships. The program also includes annual in-office blood pressure checks and no-cost entry into the annual Wellness Challenge (a 12-week weight loss contest sponsored by the hospital).

“Employees who eat well and exercise are going to feel better, sleep better and ultimately not get sick as often. Henderson Health Care is committed to the overall health and well-being of our community, and this program is a way for us to continue that.”

– Cheryl Brown, CEO
Henderson Health
Care Services

Partnership Approach

The hospital's CEO and marketing director spearheaded the Body @ Work program, with initial discussions beginning in early 2015. Upon receiving board approval, hospital leaders began planning program details, which included forming partnerships with Fox Hollow Fitness Center (Sutton, Neb.) and the Henderson Health Care Services Wellness Center to provide discounted fitness facility memberships. Both fitness facilities agreed to absorb the cost of the discount as part of their shared commitment to addressing population health issues by making fitness more affordable.

To partner with local business for program participation, in September 2015 the hospital marketing director began sending letters introducing Body @ Work and inviting business owners to join. Eight businesses enrolled at the initial launch, all of which have continued as members of Body @ Work through 2017.

Employees of participating businesses also have a voice in the education that comes from this hospital-small business partnership. Henderson Health Care invites feedback on areas of interest for newsletter topics and writes content accordingly. Giving employees a platform to contribute ideas enables Henderson Health Care to meet the needs of its Body @ Work members in more personalized and goal-oriented ways.

Key Steps

- Early 2015 – Hospital and marketing leaders initiate discussions about workplace wellness opportunities, receive board approval to develop Body @ Work.
- Spring/Summer 2015 – Marketing director oversees development of program benefits and communications, forms partnerships with local fitness centers.
- September 2015 – Marketing director sends materials introducing Body @ Work to local employers and inviting their participation.
- Ongoing – Marketing department continuously assesses feedback and new opportunities to expand and improve the program through more targeted, benefit-oriented communications.

Results

The Body @ Work program has retained all participants since inception, and has 223 employees signed on as members as of October 2017. Employers and other community members have given the program positive remarks, and member feedback indicates the newsletters have been effective at engaging and inspiring people to achieve their personal health and wellness goals, while the discounted fitness facility benefit is motivating participants to become more active. The program reports that Body @ Work communications have been useful in promoting health fairs and other community health events, as well as raising awareness of important health issues.

Lessons Learned

Provide information through a digital platform: Henderson Health Care found that most businesses scanned the printed newsletter to send as an email attachment to employees. Knowing this, the marketing department is now considering e-newsletter opportunities to better align its communications with employer and member preferences.

Emphasize the topics of greatest interest: Nutrient-rich recipes prompted the most engagement from employees. Because of its popularity, plans are underway to provide more nutrition-based content with the aid of a registered dietician to add valuable insight and recommendations.

Clearly communicate program benefits: To expand recruitment of small business partners, the marketing team is revisiting its communication plan to replace the invitation letter with face-to-face meetings between the employer, the marketing director and a Henderson Health Care nurse or dietician. In addition, enhanced communications are in development that better explain program benefits to employers—for example, how a healthier workforce can result in fewer sick days and clinic visits, which can improve productivity and potentially decrease employer-sponsored health insurance rates.

Community Partners

Henderson Health Care Services is a full-service medical facility based in Henderson, Neb., providing health care services to rural communities, primarily York, Clay and Hamilton counties. The facility encompasses a critical access hospital, two rural health clinics, specialty clinics, diagnostic services, long-term care, assisted living and independent living.

Henderson Health Care Services Wellness Center is a fitness facility in Henderson, Neb., affiliated with Henderson Health Care Services. Memberships are available to the community and offer access to weights and training equipment.

Fox Hollow Fitness Center is a 24-hour fitness facility in Sutton, Neb., offering community memberships with access to cardio and training equipment, and weights.

About Bryan Health

Bryan Health is a Nebraska-governed, nonprofit health system that cares for patients, educates tomorrow's health care providers, motivates our community with fitness and health programs, and collaborates to continually improve how we serve others.

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