Saunders County
Prevention Coalition

Case Study

Health Coaches partner with community members to achieve health and wellness goals

Abstract

In 2012, with the firmly held belief that patients achieve better health outcomes when they thoroughly understand their diagnoses and treatments, leaders at Saunders Medical Center in Wahoo, Neb., implemented a Health Coach program. Health Coaches serve as an educational resource and a personal advocate for a patient's overall health. The program has produced positive results, particularly in four primary areas of focus: mental health, breast health, diabetes and obesity. Inspired by measurable improvements and high levels of community engagement, the hospital plans to continue developing community partnerships that further the objective of helping people stay healthy and be well.

Opportunity

Leaders and staff at Saunders Medical Center are committed to helping the residents of their community achieve health and wellness goals, as well as improved health outcomes. An important factor is ensuring patients have a thorough understanding of their diagnoses and available treatment options, which is enhanced through personalized education and guidance. To engage patients and encourage personal responsibility for health and wellness, in 2012 the medical center implemented a Health Coach program, a service available free of charge to anyone in Wahoo and its surrounding communities.

Health Coach impact, by the numbers

53 people served

Number of people who accessed behavioral health therapy within the first six months

19% to 94%

Increase in percentage of patients completing mammography screening or signing up for screening reminders

2.5 points

Average improvement in diabetes patients' A1C scores, from 9.8% to 7.3%

Up to 150 pounds

Weight loss of obese patients

Source: Saunders Medical Center

"By collaborating with local organizations, we provide a holistic approach to care. Our Health Coaches have helped immensely to further this mission."

– Julie Rezac, COO
Saunders Medical Center

Partnership Approach

To address the area's most pressing health needs – mental health, preventive care and diabetes, as identified in the 2015 Community Health Needs Assessment – the Health Coaches at Saunders Medical Center partner internally with other hospital departments and externally with local organizations. Partnerships and funding vary for each of the following four initiatives, which have been the cornerstones of the Health Coach program to date:

Mental Health Initiative

Through partnerships with Family Service Lincoln and Saunders County Prevention Coalition, a behavioral health therapist comes to Saunders Medical Center once a week to see patients. All adult patients are assessed for depression, and Health Coaches follow up with patients who have a new diagnosis or medication change to teach self-management techniques for depression and anxiety. Adolescent depression screening is scheduled for January 2018 implementation.

Breast Health Initiative

Hospital leaders work in tandem with Three Rivers Public Health Department and Susan G. Komen Great Plains to administer grant funds that cover mammography screenings for medically underserved women in the area. Health Coaches track patients who are overdue for mammograms and assist them with scheduling.

Diabetes Initiative

In addition to providing education to patients with a diabetes diagnosis or medication adjustment, Health Coaches bring in a certified diabetes educator for monthly informational sessions that are free and open to the public. One Health Coach has begun the two-year process of becoming a certified diabetes educator so Saunders Medical Center can continue expanding its expertise in diabetes education and prevention.

Obesity Initiative

Community resources, such as the Wahoo Civic Center, Wahoo Senior Center, and EDGE Wellness–Saunders Medical Center's wellness program, are all utilized. Health Coaches provide weigh-ins and guidance on dietary habits, regular exercise plans, and necessary lifestyle changes in a fitness facility setting.

Key Steps

- April 2012 – Three nurse leaders complete Health Coach training and certification.
- 2012 – Health Coach program launches with the diabetes initiative. Health Coaches begin meeting with obese patients to work toward weight loss goals.
- 2015 – Community Health Needs Assessment identifies key areas of concern that result in several hospital-wide health and wellness initiatives.
- 2016 – Depression initiative begins.
- 2017 – Health Coach begins two-year training program for diabetes educator certification.
- February 2017 – Saunders Medical Center hires a third full-time Health Coach to assist with care transitions.

- April 2017 – Saunders Medical Center partners with Family Service Lincoln to provide behavioral therapy services at the medical center.

Results

The Health Coach program has seen a steady increase in interest and engagement since it began. Saunders Medical Center reports marked improvement in all four initiatives that integrated the Health Coach service:

- Since 2016, Health Coaches have worked with 58 diabetic patients, closely monitoring insulin levels and coaching on medication management and weight loss. After a year of working with the Health Coaches, the patients' average A1C measurement fell from 9.8 percent to 7.3 percent, thus reducing their risk of diabetes-related complications.
- Thanks to the Health Coaches' partnership with the community, Saunders Medical Center has produced a more holistic approach to mental health, which includes education, resources and accessible therapy services. The therapist saw 53 patients at the hospital within the first six months of the program.
- The Health Coaches have worked with 25 obese patients in 2017, and those patients lost up to 150 pounds each.
- With focused efforts to identify patients needing a mammogram, the Health Coaches increased awareness of the hospital's services and the importance of early detection. From early 2016 to July 2017, the percentage of patients completing a mammography screening or signing up for a screening reminder increased from 19 percent to 94 percent.

Lessons Learned

Prepare for growth: Recognizing the need to train more clinic nurses to keep up with the demand, Saunders Medical Center hired a third Health Coach in early 2017.

Extend partnership reach: The Health Coach program has seen consistent growth, especially in the number of weight-loss patients, so plans are underway to partner Health Coaches with the hospital's EDGE wellness center and fitness trainers to provide monitored exercise classes. Health Coaches will soon work with a registered dietitian to expand nutritional education at public schools and promote interschool challenges to encourage exercise and healthy lifestyles.

Community Partners

Saunders Medical Center is a 16-bed critical access hospital in Wahoo, Neb., with both inpatient and outpatient services. The people of Saunders Medical Center take pride in providing the very best care through the clinics, hospital, long-term care and ancillary services. They are a not-for-profit facility dedicated to community care.

Saunders Medical Center, through the EDGE, offers a variety of comprehensive wellness and fitness training programs for community members. Programs are offered in the hospital's physical therapy facility and in the Wahoo Civic Center and include stress and weight management, personal training, performance training and focused educational topics.

Family Service Lincoln is a non-profit, charitable organization in Lincoln, Neb. Its mission is to provide quality programs and services to effectively assist and strengthen individuals and families in their community.

Saunders County Prevention Coalition is a community organization based in Wahoo, Neb., that exists to provide prevention efforts to support healthy kids and families in Saunders County.

Three Rivers Health Department is a public health organization that provides clinic services for Dodge, Saunders and Washington Counties in eastern Nebraska. Its mission is to empower and educate families while promoting healthy living for the improvement of its local communities.

Part of the Wahoo Parks and Recreation department, the Wahoo Civic Center and Wahoo Senior Center provide quality recreation facilities, programs, and services to enhance the overall quality of life for the Wahoo community.

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.

Contacts

Carol A. Friesen, MPH, FHFMA
VP Health System Services
Bryan Health

Julie Rezac, RN, BSN, MEd
Chief Operating Officer
Saunders Medical Center

Stacie Sabatka, MS
Clinic Director
Saunders Medical Center