

March 12, 2007

CHFS Wellness Exclusive: Meet the ‘900-Pound Club’

MH/MR Staff Bring Work-Site Wellness to New Heights

By Beth Crace

Janice Lunsford knew she needed to make a life-changing decision.

By 2000, her physical health had begun to deteriorate so severely that it was affecting her self-esteem and her outlook on life. A smoker, she was clinically obese and had begun to suffer from high blood pressure, edema, fibromyalgia, clinical depression, sleep apnea and asthma.

“Did I feel bad? You bet. The more I went to the doctor, the more pills I got, yet I felt worse every day,” Lunsford, a staff member in the Department for Mental Health and Mental Retardation Services, said. “My muscles had become so weak that even some of the mildest activities that I engaged in became injurious to me.”

Lunsford decided to take action. But she didn’t do it alone. She enlisted the help of her colleagues to embark on a life-changing journey that would not only prove successful for Lunsford, but also the vast majority of the 145 employees of MH/MR’s central office.

“I think it’s a fair estimate to say that 85 to 90 percent of the employees are involved in some type of wellness activity,” she said.

Today, they call themselves the 900-pound club, a name chosen to symbolize the collective weight loss of the group.

“We’ve had astronomical, completely mind-boggling weight loss in excess of 900 pounds since we began the wellness initiative in the spring of 2005,” she said. “My guess is we’re closer to the 1,000-pound mark by now.”

The club is strictly voluntary and informal. Members are encouraged to participate in group activities as well as going solo. Each person’s diet and exercise program is his or her own design, and club members offer support for what others are doing. They stress that wellness is not only about proper nutrition and adequate exercise, but also restful sleep and quality “quiet time.”

“It’s basically about improving our overall quality of life,” said Lunsford.

Everyone in the group is involved in some kind of overall wellness activity and works to keep one another motivated. Lunsford said they support one another in good and bad times and share personal insights and techniques for exercise, nutrition and relaxation and meditation.

Lunsford also credited MH/MR Commissioner John Burt for his commitment to the group.

“Commissioner Burt is a picture of health and very conscientious of health and well-being, so we didn’t experience anything but positive support from him and we have appreciated it deeply,” she said.

For those trying to drop a few pounds, start an exercise plan or simply become a healthier person, group members are optimistic. They say anyone can enjoy the kind of success they've experienced with the right attitude, dedication – and enough support.

“Most of all, we motivate each other,” said Lunsford. “It’s all about how to keep the momentum of overall wellness going personally and as a group. Wellness is about appreciating and caring for your mind, body and spirit and I firmly believe our staff has excelled in this area.”

Follow this story in next week’s Focus! Read interviews with some members of the 900-Pound Club and find out how they worked their way to better health.

Social Work Month Spotlight

Group Hosting Program on Compassion Fatigue

By Anya Armes Weber

For its “Fourth Friday” CEU luncheon during Social Work Month, the Kentucky Society for Clinical Social Work (KSCSW) is hosting a lunch program on compassion fatigue.

The luncheon is at noon Friday, March 23, at the Croney and Clark Offices at 900 Beasley St., Suite 120, in Lexington. The offices are at the corner of Winchester Road and Fortune Drive.

Adrienne Whitt, LCSW, from the University of Kentucky’s Comprehensive Assessment and Testing Service is the presenter.

Cost for the event is \$15 for KSCSW members; \$25 for non-members; and no charge for social work graduate students.

Guests will receive lunch and one continuing education credit.

Call (859) 254-1035 to RSVP. For more information about the group, e-mail KSCSW President Jacky Thomas.

Employee Challenge: May the Best Cabinet Win

Get ready to challenge your fellow employees in a friendly, inter-agency competition. The Get Healthy Kentucky State Employee Physical Activity Challenge will pit cabinets and state agencies against one another in a battle of physical fitness from March 26 to May 12.

This is an exciting opportunity to represent your workplace in a six-week, points-based program aimed at increasing employee physical activity.

Cabinets and agencies earn points in two categories: the percentage of employee participation; and points earned by individual employees. Employees earn points by logging their physical activity online.

After all participants have completed the six-week challenge, a trophy will be awarded to the cabinet or state agency with the most points.

You can sign up today at www.gethealthy.ky.gov.

To join the CHFS team, click on the “Take the Challenge” button to register for the challenge and join our group. Register as a new member by entering your individual information and enter the following group information:

Group ID Number: 54763

Group Member ID/Name: Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services

Remember to log your activity daily to ensure your points are counted. If you have further questions regarding the challenge, contact Wellness Coordinator Kris Hayslett at 564-9592 or e-mail at kris.hayslett@ky.gov

Free Foot Analysis

A representative from Cool Comfort Shoes Store will be in the CHFS Cafeteria Conference Room from noon to 1 p.m. Tuesday, March 20, to talk about getting a correct shoe-fitting as well as selecting the perfect shoe for you. A free foot analysis will be provided. This session is limited to the first 30 people who sign up. To register, contact Wellness Coordinator Kris Hayslett at 564-9592, ext. 3797.

Employee Recognition Tip

Some of the most effective forms of recognition cost nothing at all. A sincere word of thanks from the right person at the right time can mean more to an employee than a raise, a formal award or a whole wall of certificates or plaques.

Part of the power of such rewards comes from the knowledge that someone took the time to notice the achievement, seek out the employee responsible and personally deliver praise in a timely manner.

Research has shown that the type of reward employees most prefer is personalized, spur-of-the-moment recognition from their direct supervisors. In a recent survey of American workers, 63 percent of the respondents ranked a “pat on the back” as a meaningful incentive.

Because several studies on employees have shown that the greatest influence on job satisfaction is the supervisor, any manager has all the ingredients for achieving a high degree of satisfaction - and a correspondingly high level of performance - among his or her employees.

Here are just a few examples of no-cost employee recognition:

- Call an employee into your office just to thank him or her and don't discuss any other issue.
- Post a thank-you note on the employee's office door.

March 12, 2007

- Volunteer to do another person's least desirable work task for a day.
- Answer the person's telephone for the day.
- When you catch people doing something right, immediately pull out your business card and write "Thanks" or "Good job," write their name on the card and sign it.

Just remember to be creative. Use your talent and your skills to recognize your employees and fellow co-workers.

Living Well

Exercise and Sleep

By Kris Hayslett

While we are constantly bombarded with messages to eat healthier and get more physical activity, we hear little about getting adequate rest. The result is that we are currently working hard at eating the right foods and participating in more physical activity, but at the end of the day we are exhausted and unable to drop those extra pounds.

The missing piece of the puzzle is sleep. The exact mechanism of how sleep actually works to impact our health remains a mystery. However, top sleep specialists and scientists are quick to recognize that adequate sleep is necessary for healthy functioning.

Research has proven that sleep regulates mood and is directly related to learning and memory. We know that infants and children need sleep to develop and grow. But somehow we have forgotten that it is also a key ingredient to maintain health as adults.

Research has proven that sleep deprivation may also inhibit the ability to lose weight. A study conducted at the University of Chicago showed that restricting sleep to only four hours per night for a week brought healthy young adults to the point that some subjects developed glucose and insulin characteristics of a diabetic. This study takes sleep loss to an extreme, but it does prove a direct correlation to sleep and our health. Eve Van Cauter, Ph.D., who conducted this study, stated that the pattern of less sleep is the "royal route to obesity."

Follow these tips for a better night's sleep:

- Avoid alcohol and caffeine consumption.
- Avoid foods like tomato products and spicy foods close to bed time.
- Restrict your fluid intake before bedtime.
- Avoid over-eating close to bedtime.
- Avoid nicotine products.
- Exercise regularly, but avoid strenuous activity three hours before going to bed.
- Establish a consistent bedtime and wake time schedule.
- Create a relaxing routine, like soaking in a hot bath, before bedtime.
- Try not to watch TV in bed.

March 12, 2007

- Maintain a cooler room temperature at night.
- Limit your use of technology before going to bed.
- Limit your exposure to light while sleeping.
- Only get in bed if you are tired.
- If you cannot fall asleep within 15 minutes, get out of bed and return when you are tired.
- While in bed, don't dwell on not sleeping or your anxiety will increase.
- After getting in bed, think relaxing thoughts: Picture yourself in a quiet place and relax every muscle in your body while you drift off to sleep.

CHFS Focus Health Tip of the Week

By Mike Schardein, Wellness Committee Chairperson

The goal of getting healthy is complex and it incorporates many behavioral changes. If one part of your body systems falls short, you are bound to see consequences in other areas of your life.

Diet and exercise are critical to a person's health, but remember that sleep can be inherently linked to how we eat and how much, how we exercise, if we lose weight and how we function daily. As we spring forward this weekend, it's important that you adjust your schedule so you get a full eight hours of sleep each night to help you attain your fitness, nutrition and healthier lifestyle goals.

Many people may dread adjusting their internal clock to daylight-saving time. However, this is the perfect time to take a few extra minutes in the evening to enjoy warmer temperatures for a walk outside, jogging, bike riding or a little early spring yard work.

If you do decide to increase your physical activity during daylight-saving time, remember to remain well-nourished. In terms of a wellness program, spacing of meals is almost as important as what you are eating. Generally, it is acceptable to eat meals between three to four hours before starting an aerobic activity like, biking, running or walking. The important thing is to allow food to digest and ward off early evening snack cravings. Being hungry before a workout not only decreases your performance level, but also can lead to skipping activity altogether.

Employee Enrichment

By Anya Armes Weber

If you are under constant pressure to work harder, dealing with change or are facing approaching deadlines or new responsibilities, your emotions can make it more difficult to adapt quickly and find solutions.

Consultant Monika Jensen of the Aviary Group, a communications and organizational development agency in Ontario, Canada, says that "dealing with emotions can improve performance; ignoring them can breed major conflicts and interpersonal rifts that bring performance to a halt."

March 12, 2007

Being “all business” doesn’t mean you should ignore your emotions. Jensen says to cope with stress in a healthy way, you should:

- Recognize sources of emotions in the workplace.
- Recognize when emotions are getting in the way.
- Acknowledge emotions rather than sweep them under the rug.
- Remain calm and objective in the face of strong emotions.
- Recover quickly and help others do the same.

Emotions in the workplace are threatening for many people, but they are nearly impossible to avoid. Jensen says emotions can be clues to important information. Learning to be sensitive to this “emotion information” is difficult, but the increased awareness could give you a significant advantage in knowing how to approach staff and co-workers when problems arise.