

Hospitals focus on employee wellness

Organizations try to set a good example for the community

By Kelsey Brimmer, Associate Editor

HOSPITALS AND HEALTHCARE systems are increasingly coming up with ways to keep their employees healthy and motivated to stay active with the hope that this message will resonate to their surrounding communities as well.

In January, the Louisiana Hospital Association (LHA) announced a new workplace wellness initiative for hospitals throughout the state, called the Smart Choices, Better Health Hospital Campaign, focusing on healthy eating, exercise and smoking cessation.

According to Michelle Clement, the associate vice president of communications and public relations at LHA, participating hospital CEOs throughout the state appointed Campaign Champions. These representatives were given the training and resources needed to form a wellness team at their hospitals. The teams will implement hospital-specific worksite wellness action plans for their employees and communities.

Over 100 hospitals formally committed to the Smart Choices, Better Health Hospital Campaign.

"LHA will also send out quarterly updates and success stories to keep employees motivated and excited about this," said Clement.

Clement said LHA is hoping the healthcare community in the state can set a good example for the rest of the community in leading a healthier lifestyle. She said LHA plans on

implementing policy changes on the foods served in its hospitals, as well.

"We'll be working with culinary experts on serving healthier options for both patients and employees," she said. "We also have created challenges for employees to lose weight, quit smoking and eat healthier."

Saint Anne's Hospital in Fall River, Mass., recently launched a similar employee wellness program, said Susan Oldrid, the hospital's vice president for mission and community partnerships.

"We kicked off the program with our 'Stop. Rethink your drink.' campaign, which encourages employees to stay away from soda and sugary drinks," Oldrid said. "The three domains of the program are: eating healthy, physical activity and stress management programs. We're trying to create an environment where people enjoy coming to work and have a healthy balance."

Oldrid said aspects of the program include a fitness challenge with the city of Fall River, a farmer's market program to increase employee access to healthy foods and food demonstrations that show how to prepare food in a healthful way.

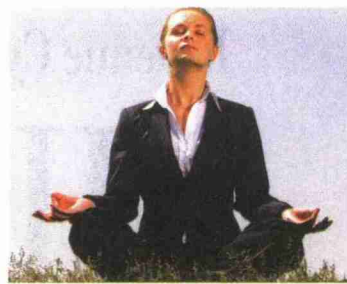
"We created an employee survey that asked all of our employees what their top health concerns were — many said food offerings at our hospital. We have put together a wellness team that has been looking over the surveys and coming up with new ideas and plans," she said. "We think our programs will absolutely promote healthy living in the community. Fall

River has a higher than state average obesity and diabetes (rate), so we ourselves must be role models."

HealthyWage, a three-year-old, New York-based company offering Americans a chance to place bets on their ability to lose weight using any diet and fitness program they choose has been cashing in on this new focus on employee wellness. The company grew its membership base by more than 500 percent last year.

According to David Roddenberry, HealthyWage co-founder, over 100 health systems are currently offering the program to their employees, with several also sponsoring it in their local community. He said almost all of the healthcare systems involved with HealthyWage in 2011 repeated the program for 2012.

"This is a great way for hospitals to connect with local businesses and reduce healthcare problems in the community like obesity," said Roddenberry. ■



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Many hospitals, like Saint Anne's Hospital in Fall River, Mass., have launched employee wellness programs to help promote healthy work environments and encourage their communities to stay healthy as well.

