

## **Wellness Superhero Challenge: Forging A Bridge Between Executives and Employees Through Wellness**

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### **Abstract**

This program was a steps-based challenge designed in conjunction with Mission Hospital's *MyHealthyLife* WellConnect employee wellness program, which is a program designed to encourage physical, occupational, financial, social, and mental wellness awareness among Mission employees in Asheville, North Carolina. The purpose was to engage the executive committee by creating a template for them to recruit employees onto their competing "Wellness Superhero" teams to improve overall employee health. The template included recruitment information (emails and flyers), motivational messages for their team members, team names and colors, and a Wellness Superhero cape. The program ran for four weeks with 17 executives and 1,020 employees involved. Incentives for the executives included recognition at Mission Hospital's annual leadership summit, and incentives for the participating employees included points toward their wellness program quarterly goal as well as a t-shirt. Requirements for the challenge included reaching 2,000 steps a day (56,000 steps total over four weeks), reading the weekly rotating wellness blurb about a wellness dimension, and answering a weekly survey question. The participants and the executives left the program after walking over 50,700 miles total and with a better grasp on how to incorporate wellness into their work days by: seeking personal enrichment, keeping healthy habits, feeling motivated and supported, and managing stress levels.

### **Background/Origins of the Project**

The Wellness Superhero Challenge was a prime opportunity to explore the direct effects workplace wellness programs have on hospital employees and the executives that manage them. This opportunity was made possible through Mission Hospital's Corporate Wellness Office, a health and wellness resource for Mission's employees, their spouses, and community members. With workplace wellness programs becoming more popular, they have shown to improve physical activity, healthy food consumption, weight loss, and blood pressure among participating employees. Workplace wellness programs also decrease absenteeism among employees and offer a high return on investment per employee (Davis et al.). There is also an increase in reported job satisfaction among employees who participate in their workplace wellness programs (Parks et al.).

Mission's Corporate Wellness Office offers preventative and disease management programs, employee wellness packages, external resources, and support groups. The *MyHealthyLife* WellConnect portal offers online tools that engage participants with wellness workshops, movement class schedules, dietician support, and more. The portal hosts personal accounts for participants to track their fitness, nutrition, and health risks. When participants register for the *MyHealthyLife* WellConnect portal they receive a pedometer. This tracks their steps and automatically loads their steps onto their account wirelessly. In addition to all of these features, the portal also hosts challenges for the participants to partake in.

It was my job to create a new wellness challenge for the first quarter of fiscal year 2015 from August through September to engage Mission Hospital employees. The Wellness Superhero challenge was planned to last four weeks and included 17 executives and over 1,000 actively involved employees. The intended purpose of the Wellness Superhero challenge was to forge a connection between the executive team and Mission 0.5 FTE employees through wellness. We used innovative tactics to keep employees engaged in their wellness via this program by encouraging the use of wireless technology to upload employees' step counts onto their portal, covering all aspects of wellness through an integrated wellness solution by spanning several dimensions of wellness, offering supportive resources like dieticians and movement classes, and having meaningful incentives by adding points toward employees' quarterly goals (DeVries).

The Wellness Superheroes Challenge was created to engage Mission's executives, also known as the Wellness Superheroes, to inspire and promote wellness in the workplace. A sense of understanding among managers who help to support a wellness culture, managers who recognized employees who do, and managers who build awareness about wellness are shown to produce desired outcomes in workplace wellness programs. (Makrides). The inclusion of executives was also meant to spark their moral obligation to the health and wellness of their employees and the return on investment of healthy employees. (Downey et al.).

The challenge would not only encourage walking, but also for the employees to examine all aspects of wellness. We chose to have the multi-dimensional approach to this program so that employees can reflect on their whole wellness and apply what they learned to their workday. We planned to incorporate two videos throughout the challenge that reflected the executive team's support of employees encompassing wellness into their lives. We also created weekly written informational segments and survey questions that highlighted that week's wellness dimension. Encouraging all types of wellness and comprehensive factors have shown to affect an employee's feelings about their job and employer: emotional wellness to cope with daily circumstances in a positive way and to learn to be constructive and maintain an even emotional

state; intellectual wellness to think clearly and critically, to learn how to reason, and how to use information to enhance quality of life; physical wellness to attend and function at work effectively and consistently; social wellness for interaction with others and establishing relationships that can enhance work life and to practice empathy, active listening, and ongoing commitments; spiritual wellness to establish values for meaningful life goals and know that their lives hold importance (Madsen).

The objective for the executives was to get employees to join their team and have them sign up for the WellConnect portal if they were not existing members, and have the most number of employees fully complete the challenge. The objective for employees was to sign up for the WellConnect portal for the first time if they were not already members and fully complete the challenge. The winning executive would be recognized at Mission Hospital's annual leadership summit, and the winning team would receive 5 points toward their quarterly goal and a t-shirt for newly registered participants on the WellConnect portal.

## **Methods and Work Undertaken**

Late June 2015: The first step was to get Mission Hospital's executive team and the marketing department on board, including executives from Mission's member hospital locations. In doing so, my community advisor and myself made the challenge look attractive and easy to our busy executives. We drafted an informational email about the challenge including incentives, dates, requests, benefits, and an overview of the toolkit they would receive from us (including flyers and weekly emails to send to their team members). We initially contacted all 20 executives and got 17 to agree to be a Wellness Superhero. We set up a meeting with Mission's marketing department to ensure that they would be able to assist us with the media and design portion of the program throughout the challenge dates.

Early July 2015: The second step was to reach out to the company that designs the *MyHealthyLife* WellConnect portal, Cerner, to ensure that they can cover everything that needed to be on the portal for promotion, maintenance, hosting, and data collection of the challenge. We created a rough timeline with Cerner and kept in contact throughout the challenge to ensure everything was being posted on the portal when appropriate. I made sure Cerner had the ability to track the number of steps each participant walked and number of participants who watched the videos, read the weekly wellness letter, and answered the survey questions. Since the pedometers automatically uploaded each employee's steps onto their portal, we could see the number of steps each employee got and how many steps their respective team walked. As for the video, the weekly reading, and the weekly survey question, we could see the participants who clicked the link to open these resources, and they would be counted as completing that task.

July 2015: The third step was to travel around Asheville and meet each executive to take their picture, distribute hand-made capes (each executive chose their color), take video (we asked "what do you do to support wellness at Mission", "what is your favorite superhero", "if you could have a superpower what would it be", and "what advice would you give to someone embarking on a wellness journey"), decide a Wellness Superhero name, and to get a one-liner to promote themselves. The one-liner, picture, and superhero name were all included in their flyer. The videos were compiled to show during the first and last weeks of the challenge.

Late July: The fourth step was to send marketing the information we gathered from step three. First, the flyers were created. These included a picture of the executive with their cape, their superhero name and one-liner, general sign-up information, and general challenge information. Each executive received 50 paper copies and a PDF version of their flyer to encourage employees to join their team. Second, the two videos were created. The first week's video was a play on the "Rocky" theme song and starred the CEO of Mission Health discussing the importance of health and wellness. The second video, shown the last week of the challenge, was a compilation of the footage we took of all of the executives answering the wellness questions.

Early August: The fifth step was to create the weekly emails that would be sent to the executives that they could use and send to their team members. These emails included a sample recruitment letter for executives to send to employees, a weekly email to send to executives with reminders, stats, and tips, and a weekly sample email for executives to send to their team members for encouragement.

Early August 2015: The sixth step was to solidify tasks. These are as follows: 1) 56,000 steps per person over 4 weeks (2,000 steps a day), 2) watching two videos the first and last week of challenge, 3) reading a short weekly segment about that week's dimension of wellness and a celebrity who exemplifies that dimension, and 4) answering a survey question about that week's dimension of wellness. There was more than one reading sent out each week due to having six dimensions over the course of four weeks. Some of the dimensions were joined for the survey questions as well for the same reason. I added spiritual wellness at the last minute because of its influence on optimism, sense of coherence in the workplace, and overall sense of well-being for employees (Adams et al.). The following are those who exemplified the dimension of wellness and the survey questions for each of the dimensions:

- Occupational: Franklin D. Roosevelt
- Physical: Michael Jordan
- Intellectual: Helen Keller
- Environmental: Nelson Mandela
- Social/Financial: Katharine Hepburn
- Spiritual: Mother Teresa
- Occupational/Social/Financial: In your opinion, what does having "financial wellness" mean?
- Physical: What's one new physical activity you would try and why?
- Intellectual/Spiritual/Mental: What techniques do you use to help relax your mind, when feeling stressed?
- Environmental: What can you do on a regional, national, or global scale to help better your health, or the health of others?

Mid August 2015: The seventh step was to start advertising for the challenge. We did this by posting information about dates, objectives, and sign-up information on the portal. We also gave the executives their flyers so they could start recruiting employees to join their Wellness Superhero team.

Late August 2015: The last step was to plan the extra events. These included a trip to Mission Children's Hospital by the executive team in their capes, posting challenge statistics on the wellness bulletin boards around Mission's campus, buying a look-alike bobble heads for the winning executive, and ordering the t-shirts for employees on the winning team who signed up for the WellConnect portal for the first time.

September 2015: This month we made sure everything ran smoothly with the challenge and fixed any problems that may have surfaced. Other than slight technological errors on the WellConnect portal, nothing major occurred to disrupt the schedule of the challenge.

Late September 2015: Gather final data on teams, announce winners, and distribute prizes. We pulled and analyzed the data from Cerner as described in the second step.

## **Challenges Faced and Responses to Those Challenges**

Fortunately, there were no challenges that severely inhibited the production of the program or affected its intended outcomes. In the planning stages of the challenge, we were intending on only engaging six executives over the course of six weeks. We would post one video a week concerning each of the dimensions of wellness that would highlight one of the executives each week. This was the original plan because it would be easier to contact six executives instead of all 20. However, we were requested to reach out to all 20 executives and shorten the program to four weeks. This gave us more to do in a shorter amount of time. We emailed all 20 executives, and 17 got back to us wanting to participate. Instead of six videos, or one each week, we decided to only make two and send out weekly readings about the dimensions of wellness. I struggled with this because I had already made a timeline with the original plan, and I had to go back and re-schedule meetings, timeframes, and due dates. There were also issues concerning the time it would take for the flyers, pictures, and videos to be edited. Although we received the flyers and videos from marketing a couple days late, we were still able to get the flyers to the executives and post the video for the first week without delaying the program. Another challenge we faced during the program was with special requests by the executive team. Originally we wanted all of the executives to have the same promotional material across the board, but some of the executives had special requests that we had to abide by.

At first, I struggled with balancing and prioritizing what needed to be done. However, with help from my supervisor and by working on my organizational skills, I was able to efficiently complete tasks on time and create back-up plans when needed. An example of this was when I was working on creating the weekly emails and solidifying the weekly tasks. I was scrambled, and my work was not as suitable as it should have been. After meeting with my supervisor and organizing a day-by-day plan to effectively complete my assignment, the emails and the tasks turned out appropriately.

## **Project Outcomes & Sustainability**

In the creation of the Wellness Superhero challenge, we were forming an annual tradition to promote wellness for Mission employees through executives' influence by reinforcing all facets of wellness and raising average daily step counts. We not only focused on physical health via the total steps requirement, but also engaging employees to reflect on all aspects of their health and how they can fit that into their work and personal schedules. In addition to building a health community among employees and executives, it was hoped that this program would expose employees to a variety of ways they can reach their highest quality of life, inside and outside of Mission Hospital. In regards to broader societal issues, this step is crucial because of the prevalence of stressors and general lack of knowledge about healthy lifestyles today. This program was meant to give employees the tools and motivation to harness the way they make healthy choices. Mission's Corporate Wellness Office now has an annual challenge that

employees can enjoy participating in that promotes departmental interconnectedness, healthy lifestyles, and a strong Mission community.

The participants in the challenge gave constructive feedback and encouragement in response to the weekly survey questions. Here are a few examples:

"Having a job I enjoy, supportive coworkers and bosses who help me succeed, and the ability to balance my work and off-time in a healthy way."

"Your job brings life to you, rather than sucking the life from you."

"Occupational wellness is when your work starts becoming exciting for you, and brings happiness."

"Having a job that keeps me motivated and interested. Feeling inspired and challenge every day and knowing when I leave in the evening that I have done my best."

"... my workplace values the employees' health, and that we work together to improve our lives by being more aware of wellness."

Mission has a timeline and a model for this challenge to use in the future. It was the plan to keep this challenge going annually.

As a community engaged scholar, I was able to learn a lot from this experience. First, I was able to effectively plan and execute a hospital-wide wellness program. This took organizational skills and coordination. Second, I learned how to be flexible. Usually, in large-scale programs, many things do not go as planned. I need to be prepared for changes and have a plan in place for these instances. Last, I was able to make effective health changes among a population of hospital employees by encouraging at least 2,000 steps a day and having employees reflect on their wellness balance. This will be sustained as I continue into a nursing career and hold employee and patient care with a high standard.

## **Ties to Academia**

The importance of incorporating dimensions of wellness has been repeated in my Health and Wellness Promotion courses. After considering this and conducting research on my own, it was clear that including more than just physical activity into this challenge would make it the most effective on the participating employees' lives. I was also able to apply a health promotion project plan to this project by conducting a needs assessment (what the employees needed or lacked to reach their highest quality of life, how to meet them there, and existing programs), develop a program to match these needs, create process and outcome objectives (what was specifically going to be done with program components and specifically what I wanted for the employees to get out of it), and create long-term outcomes. In doing so, we marketed this program with clear and friendly messages, involved executives, made it convenient, and offered meaningful incentives (Milano). I was also influenced by the Active Living course I had taken. I was aware of how many Mission employees sit during the day and how that can be detrimental to their health. Through the Wellness Superhero challenge, we were able to reveal the benefits of moving more and sitting less since it was a steps-based challenge. Last, I was able to utilize my lessons about reading and analyzing research articles — how to read peer-reviewed articles and apply them to programming. For example, after looking at research published in the journal *Obesity*, I was able to dissect how this particular steps-based challenge affected hospital employees by looking at their research methods and results. After absorbing this information, I

was able to translate what I learned into a program that would work for Mission's employees (Zapka et al.).

## Conclusion

The Wellness Superhero Challenge was the perfect opportunity to explore how wellness programs directly affect employee health and how crucial employee health is to the success of any organization. Since 63% of the adult population is employed, we have the opportunity to make that part of their lives fulfilling through wellness promotion at their workplaces. We are able to incorporate research and experience to implement cost-effective outcomes (Young). From this community engagement experience, I learned a lot that will prepare me for my future career: I was exposed to many career opportunities and contacts, learned the ins and outs of corporate wellness, realized my personal strengths and how to harness those talents professionally, and gained experience in a professional workplace environment.

Overall, this program values Mission Hospital employees, the Asheville community, and society at large by supporting all aspects of wellness and promoting healthy choices in and out of the workplace.

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