

Building a Culture of Health: A Committee Approach to Wellness

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Abstract

REVIVE, a committee of eight employees within the School of Kinesiology at Tarleton State University, focuses on promoting healthy lifestyles for employees. In an effort to promote interest in all dimensions of wellness, REVIVE offers a variety of events including, but not limited to: health screenings, information sessions, personal training, outdoor outings, exercise videos, and a walking program.

Keywords: Worksite wellness; collaboration; health.

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INTRODUCTION

Successful worksite wellness programs can improve employee lifestyle behaviors, increase productivity, decrease absenteeism, enhance recruitment and retention, encourage morale, reduce health risks, and lower health-care costs [1]. With these benefits in mind, many colleges and universities strive to establish a well-designed wellness program in order to better serve faculty, staff, and administration. Effective employee wellness programs conduct needs assessments, incorporate wellness into the school's culture, effectively communicate and offers accessibility, offers incentives, and creates collaborations and partnerships across campus [2].

Employees within the Texas A&M University System (TAMUS) utilize Blue Cross Blue Shield (BCBS) of Texas as the health insurance provider. All eleven member institutions within the TAMUS are encouraged to direct their own employee wellness program. While each university is part of the larger system, they are given autonomy regarding function, organizational structure, and approach to employee wellness.

Overview: Tarleton State University

Tarleton State University (TSU) is a TAMUS member institution. With approximately 1,586 employees (716 staff; 870 faculty) and 13,226 students [3], TSU is considered a mid-sized institution. The TSU employee wellness program, titled "REVIVE Wellness," is focused on enriching the lives of the

university's employees in the six dimensions of wellness [4]. The main goals of REVIVE are to motivate employees to take an active role in improving their health, and to demonstrate organizational commitment to building a culture of health [5]. To this end, REVIVE's purpose is to encourage and facilitate activities related to all aspects of wellness, educate employees on the BCBS of Texas benefits package, and encourage the use of interactive digital wellness resources and tools (i.e. Well on Target, MyEVIVE).

REVIVE is provided an annual grant from the TAMUS Chancellor's Office and operates out of TSU's School of Kinesiology. Similar to the collaborative model of University of Alabama's WellBama [6], institutional partnerships between the School of Kinesiology, Dick Smith Library, Recreation Center, Human Resource Department, Employee Services, Division of External Outreach, Division of Finance and Administration, Sodexo (food supplier) and the President's Office exist. These partnerships and collaborations provide resources and opportunities for REVIVE to prosper and grow.

From 2017 to 2019, REVIVE was directed by a full-time faculty member and one graduate assistant. REVIVE was successful under this organizational structure and experienced great accomplishments regarding employee health and wellbeing. The successes of REVIVE did not come easy, as the faculty member and graduate assistant put in long hours equitable to working two-full time jobs. In an effort to effectively balance the responsibilities and duties

associated with employee wellness, REVIVE was restructured during the summer of 2019. Currently, REVIVE is operated through a committee model.

A total of eight TSU employees, as well as four graduate assistants and interns, make-up the REVIVE Committee. The individuals who form the newly established REVIVE Committee are all affiliated with the School of Kinesiology at TSU. Each committee member was assigned a role in leading the charge regarding various aspects of wellness. The following are descriptions of roles and responsibilities of each position.

REVIVE Committee

Wellness Champion

The Wellness Champion (WC), who also serves as the Associate Dean of the College of Education and the Head of the School of Kinesiology, oversees the REVIVE program. The WC collaborates on health and wellness initiatives with the TAMUS and BCBS of Texas. The WC is also tasked with determining who will serve on the REVIVE committee.

Human Resources Liaison

The Human Resources Liaison (HRL) is charged with promoting the use of BCBS of Texas employee benefits. In doing so, the HRL provides detailed reports of employee engagement and claims data from Tarleton Employee Services, the TAMUS, Catapult and BCBS of Texas. The HRL works closely with members of the committee to formulate strategies and brainstorm events to target dimensions of wellness identified as areas of concern for TSU employees.

Wellness Events Coordinator

Utilizing the data provided by the HRL, the Wellness Events Coordinator (WEC) brainstorms with committee members in deciding what health and wellness-enhancing activities REVIVE will provide for employees. This discussion is based upon what health-enhancing goals the committee seeks to meet with each activity (i.e. increased physical activity, reducing stress, and enhancing social well-being). After selecting what activities REVIVE will offer, the WEC determines who is best suited to organize and lead the event. When qualified, the WEC may take responsibility in organizing and carrying out the event. For planned activities that fall outside the expertise of the WEC, they may recruit volunteers with related experience or specialization to lead the activity.

Narrative Inquiry Research Coordinator

The Narrative Inquiry Research Coordinator (NIRC) is responsible for all qualitative research projects related to REVIVE. In collaboration with other committee members, the NIRC works to organize research projects aimed at examining employees' use of, and experiences surrounding, the REVIVE program. Upon confirmation of REVIVE events being scheduled,

the NIRC works to utilize events/activities for data collection with the purpose of examining REVIVE's impact on employees.

Fitness Research Coordinator

Fitness initiative proposals are presented to the Fitness Research Coordinator (FRC). The FRC then develops a research and data collection plan for each initiative. The initiatives are facilitated and data is collected by the event specific REVIVE committee member. Raw data from each initiative is relayed back to the FRC for storage and analysis. During monthly wellness meetings, the FRC presents initiative results, driving the continuation or termination of each wellness experience. The FRC, along with the WEC and NIRC, is responsible for research projects requiring Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and ensuring REVIVE remains in "good-standing" with the University IRB. Lastly, the FRC generates data reports regarding the function of fitness training on employee perceived wellness for the TAMUS program review.

Outdoor Recreation Coordinator

The Outdoor Recreation Coordinator (ORC) is responsible for organizing recreation activities for the REVIVE Program. While the ORC is focused on the physical dimension of wellness, they also aim to organize events that focus on the social, emotional, and environmental dimensions of wellness. The ORC organizes and schedules events such as trips to state parks, sporting activities, hunter/boating safety courses, and swim lessons. Through the planning of outdoor recreation activities, the ORC builds relationships within the wellness community at large. Further, these events offer the opportunity for employees to build relationships amongst themselves.

Historian

The principal responsibility of the REVIVE Historian is to research, discover, analyze, and document the development of the wellness program. Such a task requires gathering data from various sources using historical research methods. For example, the Historian examines archived documents in the TSU library's special collections and archives, conducts interviews with former wellness directors, and is tasked with putting together a complete narrative of the wellness program's origin. In circumstances where fitting, the Historian will aid other committee members (e.g. WEC, NIRC, FRC) in research projects and or/service events.

Public Relations Coordinator

The Public Relations Coordinator (PRC) serves as a general point of contact for the REVIVE program. In doing so, the PRC manages email communication with all TSU employees, oversees REVIVE social media accounts, schedules appointments with REVIVE clients/guests, and supervises student interns and graduate assistants. In

addition, the PRC completes a variety of tasks including, but not limited to: managing the REVIVE budget, processing and filing invoices, maintaining the REVIVE directory and operating manual, initiating projects to support vision of REVIVE, and organizes all travel for the REVIVE Committee.

Student Interns/Graduate Assistants

Over the past few years, REVIVE has allotted funds to support student internships and graduate assistantships (GA). These students complete a variety of tasks including, but not limited to, maintaining wellness social media accounts (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, blogs, podcasts), setting up for events, completing administrative tasks such as budget reports and order forms, and designing promotional material. In addition, student workers are provided opportunities to assist committee members in conducting research projects. Students in these positions are completing degrees housed within the School of Kinesiology, and are aspiring leaders in various sub-disciplines of kinesiology. Therefore, REVIVE interns and GAs are assigned to tasks and projects aligned with their career aspirations.

Highlighted Initiatives

Since the formation of the REVIVE Committee, there have been a variety of wellness events and activities provided to TSU employees. While some of these events occur on a weekly basis, others occur at various times throughout the semester. To encourage employee focus on well-being and reduce lifestyle-related issues that affect work productivity, full-time TSU employees are eligible to utilize the Wellness Release Time Policy [7], which allows employees 30-minutes, three times per week during normal working hours for participation in wellness activities.

Walking Wednesdays

REVIVE conducts a weekly event titled “Walking Wednesdays,” during which TSU employees voluntarily gather in a central meeting location at noon and walk a two-mile route across campus. Each week participants and REVIVE committee members are encouraged to “walk with someone new,” in efforts to create a support/social system. In the interest of determining employees’ motivations behind involvement and to examine the impact Walking Wednesdays has on participants, the NIRC conducts walking interviews and asks participants to complete critical incident reflections focused on employees’ personal experiences related to walking [8, 9].

Personal Training

The Kinetic Performance Laboratory (KPL) at TSU collaborates with REVIVE to provide complimentary individual and group fitness training sessions to employees (60+ per semester). All training sessions are delivered by student lab assistants/interns who have obtained professional

credentials/certifications and are pursuing a career in the fitness, wellness, and/or athletic performance profession. The FRC coordinates physical assessments (e.g. anthropometrics, physical fitness, and perceived wellness) and personal training sessions for employees of TSU with the KPL Director. For the 2019 fall semester, 65 employees registered to receive these services.

Information Sessions

Led by the HRL, informational sessions focus on educating employees on a variety of topics. For example, one interactive “lunch and learn” session focused on educating employees on wellness resources for employee benefits. Employees were provided lunch while the HRL guided them through navigating MyEvide- a website with all available resources offered by BCBS of Texas. In addition, the HRL also implemented a “will workshop” in which employees were guided through the process of writing a will.

Exercise Videos

The WEC filmed various “desk exercises” to share with TSU employees with the purpose of encouraging movement during work breaks. The three to five minute videos focused on flexibility/range of motion and muscular strength/endurance with body weight or resistance bands. During the videos, physical demonstrations were provided on how to execute the various movements/exercises. All videos are filmed and made available to the public on the REVIVE social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram). Roughly one video is published per week to allow employees time to attempt each workout before the next video is released.

Additional Events

In addition to the primary events, REVIVE also organizes supplementary events to provide employees with opportunities to focus on wellness while also incorporating new and exciting ideas. Examples of these activities include “star gazing” at a nearby state park, mobile onsite mammography, balance assessments, skin cancer screenings, and on-campus Catapult Health evaluations. Catapult Health, a benefit of BCBS of Texas, is a wellness screening that includes a blood test, medical history and video chat with a physician assistant.

SUMMARY

Since the implementation of the REVIVE committee, there has been a positive balance shift regarding the roles and responsibilities associated with the employee wellness program. Each committee member and involved student brings with them their own passions, interests, and ideas regarding health and wellbeing. As a result, a culture of innovation and collaboration exists regarding TSU’s worksite wellness.

The authors of this brief report understand that the committee structure utilized at TSU is not generalizable. However, it was the authors' intent to detail the organizational structure of REVIVE with the thought that the committee leadership approach to employee wellness programs could be beneficial for other colleges and universities that are considering restructuring or implementing a new program.

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