

Organizations Collaborate to Provide Wellness Programs to Area Businesses

BY RHODA WEISS

A comprehensive, high-quality wellness program may be one way a company can lower its healthcare benefit costs. By helping employees remain healthy, wellness programs may reduce absenteeism and improve morale. For example, the absentee rate of participants in Du Pont's corporate fitness program decreased by 47.5 percent during a six-year period. Additional data from many companies indicate that these programs' savings outweigh their costs. Corporate fitness programs are also adding to companies' bottom line through improved productivity, recruitment, and retention.

These findings have not escaped the notice of Saint John's Health System, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in Anderson, IN. The three organizations teamed up in October 1994 to sponsor Tri-Wellness, a partnership dedicated to improving the community's health and well-being through provision of health assessments, services, and facilities to businesses and individuals in Anderson.



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The key task of this not-for-profit organization is to tailor wellness programs to fulfill the specific needs of employees of local businesses. Most workplaces have neither the space nor the staff to offer employees on-site corporate wellness programs. And although Saint John's Health System already had a wellness program in place, alone it could not fulfill all aspects of a corporate wellness program. But together the health system, YMCA, and YWCA are able to offer a range of services.

"Our three organizations share common Christian missions and values," says James Stephens, president and chief executive officer (CEO) of Saint John's Health System. "Tri-Wellness allows us to build on our common foundations and combine existing high-quality programming to improve the health and fitness of the community."

HEALTH ASSESSMENTS

Saint John's Health System conducts clinical and diagnostic assessments—measuring an individual's fitness level and risk of illness. YMCA and YWCA then help fulfill clients' recreational and fitness needs revealed in the assessments. Tri-Wellness offers four types of physical health assessments, which are usually paid for by employers.

Through the Mini Fitness Assessment, Saint John's staff analyze such things as a person's diet, physical activity, and stress level. This basic assessment costs an employer from \$10 to \$12 per employee, depending on the number of participants.

In the Wellness Screening, Saint John's staff conduct additional screenings such as cholesterol.

The Complete Wellness Assessment includes blood tests that check for various diseases.

In the Executive Assessment, the most comprehensive, 24 tests are completed, including an electrocardiogram, urinalysis, hearing and blood chemistry tests, chest x-ray, and vision and pulmonary screenings. Employers pay \$248 per employee for each Executive Assessment conducted.

A BUSINESS THAT FOSTERS WELLNESS

Pay Less Super Markets has participated in Saint John's wellness program since 1989—even before the health system joined with YMCA and YWCA to form Tri-Wellness.

After health assessments of all Pay Less employees revealed that their health was declining, Saint John's proposed programs to help Pay Less employees achieve optimal health. The programs included computerized dietary analysis, stress management, and exercise.

During the assessment, cancer was detected in three employees, even though none of them had symptoms. The early detection was fortuitous: Since their treatment, the three employees are doing well.

"Our employees are learning steps they can take to optimize their own wellness," says Patricia Storm, Pay Less director of recruiting and training. "Our benefit is healthy, happy employees and improved results in physical assessments."

PROFILE AND PROGRAM

Once an assessment has been completed, Saint John's staff review the results with the employee, recommending healthy life-style changes. Tri-Wellness also provides the business with a health profile on its employees. The profile identifies specific risk factors for the group and individual employees and recommends areas for employee health improvement that can be addressed through individual or group programs.

Each of an organization's employees receives a Tri-Wellness participation card. They present the card when registering for wellness programs, which employees themselves usually pay for. Some programs are free (e.g., nutrition, breast self-examination, and worksite safety classes); others are offered at discounted fees (e.g., aerobics, swimming, and yoga). In addition to these programs, participants can choose from many others, including arthritis rehabilitation and exercise, swimming, grief counseling, healthy back programs, relationship enrichment and communication skills, massage therapy, and stress management. Program sites include the workplace, Saint John's Health System, YMCA, and YWCA.

COMMUNICATING WITH THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Tri-Wellness uses a variety of communication strategies to increase its program's visibility, notes Steven D. Painter, manager of corporate communications at Saint John's Health System. Saint John's is currently responsible for most of the marketing and promotion of the Tri-Wellness program.

Stories about Tri-Wellness have run in local newspapers (see ad) and on local radio programs. Saint John's also highlights Tri-Wellness at events such as the annual Chamber of Commerce trade fair, local Women in Business gatherings, and "Wake Up with Anderson," a local bimonthly business breakfast that attracts approximately 300 attendees. Through flyers, announcements, and its newsletter, the Anderson YMCA lets its members know about the benefits of joining the Tri-Wellness program.

In addition, Saint John's markets Tri-Wellness to its own employees, physicians, board members, patients and their families, and others who come in contact with the hospital's programs and



Arthritis rehabilitation and exercise (above) is one program offered by Tri-Wellness. Saint John's Health System is responsible for most of the marketing and promotion of Tri-Wellness (right).

services. Tri-Wellness invites individuals to join; membership does not have to be initiated by an employer.

WELLNESS: A WAY OF LIFE

Tri-Wellness representatives have talked with 38 companies

Three of Anderson's most experienced health and fitness experts—Saint John's Health System, the YMCA and YWCA—have joined together to form Tri-Wellness. This program offers complete health assessments and health and fitness programming to help individuals achieve wellness. Wellness is an integrated approach to improving the total health of the individual—body, mind, and spirit.

In addition to benefiting individuals, Tri-Wellness also assists businesses by helping them assess the health of their employees. After an initial assessment, education and fitness programs are offered to address identified health risks and areas for improvement. Tri-Wellness can help improve the health of the individual, and can help lower health care costs for individuals and businesses.

For information about Tri-Wellness, call Syd Kyle, Saint John's Wellness Coordinator, 646-8323.

Try Being Healthier

Try Being Happier

Try Living Longer

Try Saving Health Care Dollars

Tri-Wellness
A Cooperative Effort Between Saint John's Health System • YMCA • YWCA

that have shown an interest in the program. Of the companies that have committed to Tri-Wellness, nearly 90 percent of all employees participate in assessments. After a company's employees have participated for six months in the program, Tri-Wellness staff will—at no charge—assess employees' progress.

The three organizations that sponsor Tri-Wellness feel good about reaching out to the members of the Anderson community. "It is exciting to see employers placing an emphasis on the role health and fitness play in contributing to increased productivity and a positive environment in the workplace," says YWCA Board President Cindy Smith. Adds YMCA CEO Dan Sager, "The YMCA believes that promoting healthy life-styles is a high priority, and Tri-Wellness helps make wellness a way of life in our community." □

☎ For more information on the Tri-Wellness program, call Syd Kyle, Saint John's wellness coordinator, 317-646-8323.