

Workplace Wellness—Taking Care of the Caregivers and the Community

Cornell Cooperative Extension
Niagara County

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Cornell Cooperative Extension of Niagara County (CCE Niagara) is working to ensure that Community Health Center of Niagara (CHCN) provides access to healthy, affordable foods, and opportunities to engage in physical activity.

Health center and hospital policies and staff should support and model healthy behaviors because a healthful food and physical environment reinforces clinical recommendations and complements health care organizations' mission to support community health. Unfortunately, health care establishments across New York often fail to support staff and undermine public health messaging altogether.

Taking Care of Caregivers

The combination of high visibility, organizational mission, and influence of employees on patients and families makes health centers and hospitals obvious places to promote health. At the organizational level, services depend upon motivated staff who are capable of delivering high-quality care. This is compromised when staff miss work due to their own poor health. Unplanned staff absences reduce care capacity, disrupt continuity of care, and cause workload stress among colleagues.

When any employee misses work, it is costly to the employer, especially in the health care sector. Understaffed and underperforming health care teams can result in less-efficient services, more expensive care, and compromised patient safety.

Worksite wellness programs help take care of the caregivers by supporting healthy lifestyles and the community at large.



CHCN staff participate in Zumba

Wellness at the Health Care Worksite

For nearly two decades, CHCN has provided care to the underserved, communities of color, and people who are otherwise disenfranchised by the health care system. This year, CHCN started providing support to its own staff through a workplace wellness program.

Using data from an employee survey, Creating Healthy Schools and Communities (CHSC) grantee CCE Niagara helped CHCN create a wellness plan that addresses the individual and his/her working environment. The wellness committee offered employees nutrition workshops and physical activity contests, and the organization adopted a policy to ensure that food at meetings meet nutritional guidelines. In addition, signs were posted to convey health information and encourage employees and patients to engage in physical activity (e.g., take the stairs). CHSC funding was used to equip three breakrooms with a smoothie machine/blender, crockpot, and a popcorn machine, which have inspired staff to implement a salad club, hold a chili-cooking competition, and eat healthy meals together. The worksite wellness program has not only helped staff to engage in healthier behaviors; it has boosted morale.

*“The workplace wellness initiative has been a real morale booster for the staff. Cooking together has encouraged teamwork with different employees bringing something healthy to the table.”
Felicia Jones, project manager/community relations director.*

Partnering to Promote Health

The wellness program has led CCE Niagara to become involved in additional worksite wellness efforts, healthy food access, and community events. CCE Niagara helped CHCN become a Veggie Van site where employees can buy farm fresh produce from the parking lot at work. This has been expanded to the community, as neighbors have begun to frequent the van and the farmer has increased sales. Having a strong health care partner has enabled CCE Niagara to provide additional services at community events, which is helping to spread the good health messages throughout the community. For example, CHCN volunteers supported CCE Niagara’s “Let’s Go Walk” initiative by offering blood pressure screenings, and there are plans to replace unhealthy foods with healthier fare at community events. And at long last, the CHCN is becoming a place that serves its patients, employees, and community a menu for a healthy life.



to learn more...

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The Veggie Van offers CHCN employees and neighbors access to fresh produce



**Creating Healthy Schools
and Communities**

The places where we live, learn, work, and play all contribute to our ability to become and stay healthy. Creating Healthy Schools and Communities (CHSC), a five-year (2015-2020) New York State Department of Health-funded initiative, is helping build stronger, healthier communities.