



A Journey into Community Wellness

“The collaborative relationship between PS4H and Lake Region Healthcare (LRH) allows us to accomplish more together than alone. This relationship also supports a common goal and the aim of LRH: helping people in our region improve their health.”

Brandi Sillerud
Senior Vice-President of Clinic Operations
Lake Region Healthcare



In making community health and wellness a priority Lake Region Healthcare (LRH) in Fergus Falls, MN has caused a stir among staff, patients, and community residents. One of the first visible steps in the wellness direction took place when LRH agreed to be a partner with the Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) during the SHIP 1.0 Golden Start Initiative in 2010. During this partnership, LRH learned how to support breastfeeding among staff as well as to encourage breastfeeding among its patient population. This resulted in the establishment of a lactation room and a redesign of clinic flow to support lactation conversations with new moms.

During SHIP 2.0, LRH became further engaged with SHIP when it agreed to partner with PartnerSHIP 4 Health (PS4H), the local public health arm of SHIP in Becker, Clay, Otter Tail, and Wilkin counties. During SHIP 2.0 LRH received resources and technical assistance to strengthen its worksite wellness program and to improve the clinic system related to weight management and tobacco cessation.

In the meantime, LRH CEO Larry Schulz became engaged in a group called “Forward Fergus Falls” as the chairperson of the health and wellness destiny driver group. Schulz convened a meeting with PartnerSHIP 4 Health, about the role of LRH in community health. Shortly thereafter, Phatty Natties, a group fitness center, was welcomed to LRH, offering exercise options to staff and to community residents. LRH also participated in the local PartnerSHIP 4 Health Bike and Walk to Work Week Competition, competing for a trophy with MState Technical and Community College in Fergus Falls and the Fergus Falls School District. In addition, LRH created “Lake Region Takes Root,” a community garden that produced and connected fresh fruits and vegetables to those in the community who had limited access to such produce.

Meanwhile, Brandi Sillerud, Sr. VP of Clinic Operations, as part of a Doctor of Nursing Practice program, created a study regarding physical activity, nutrition, exercise, and work-related fatigue. She engaged 35 individual staff in her study and discovered that individuals that followed a balanced diet and engaged in regular physical activity experienced less workplace fatigue.

In the midst of all of this, Schulz, was seen walking and biking much more than usual. According to Schulz, “I have been doing a lot of walking and watching what I am eating. With the help of Phatty Natties and lots of people and physicians and people in dietary, I was able to lose 70 pounds. Most of it was through exercise.”

Simultaneously, LRH was working with Otter Tail County Public Health and other community partners to complete a community health assessment and create a community health improvement plan. One of the needs identified by the community was obesity. In response to these findings, LRH partnered more intentionally with PS4H to address physical activity and nutrition. The result is that many LRH clinicians have been trained in motivational interviewing in order to foster a patient-provider conversation about weight management. LRH is also piloting a project where a physician refers patients to Phatty Natties to create and monitor an individualized exercise plan. Several community health conversations were held at M-State sponsored by LRH, PS4H, and Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement (ICSI), and Minnesota Public Television.

LRH also continues to sponsor an annual Half Marathon, 5K run and 1-mile walk, and to offer personal and group training opportunities in its Health & Wellness HUB. Most recently LRH sponsored a walking challenge to encourage residents to collectively walk 3,829 miles, the distance to Waikiki, Hawaii, in six weeks. The Walk to Waikiki challenge launched January 1, 2014, and concluded February 13, 2014 with a special event at the Lake Region Healthcare Health Expo.

LRH is using a popular walking destination in Fergus Falls, Lake Alice to install four Be Fit Circuit signs to encourage residents to include some additional exercises on their walks. Each sign will have two different exercises listed with step-by-step instructions, illustrations and a fitness index with the suggested number of repetitions for both beginners and advanced participants.

All of these changes and opportunities may be just the tip of the wellness iceberg in the Fergus Falls Community. As LRH continues to lead by example and through its resources and partnerships, it is now up to community members to take the next step in the wellness journey offered and supported by LRH.

