



Addressing Community Needs through Expanded Health and Wellness Offerings

By Michael T. Hansen, FACHE, President and CEO, Columbus Community Hospital

Columbus Community Hospital is a community-owned, non-profit medical center located in Columbus, Nebraska. In recent years, county health rankings and community health needs assessments have noted that our area residents have issues with health behaviors, especially those that pertain to diet and exercise. For example, county health rankings indicated that our residents have high rates of obesity and physical inactivity, as well as poor access to exercise opportunities. Community health needs assessments noted similar issues with residents' high rates of obesity and related chronic health conditions, such as diabetes and heart disease.

Expanding Offerings to Meet Residents' Needs

At Columbus Community Hospital, it's our mission to improve the health of the communities we serve. Faced with the results of the county health rankings and community needs assessments, it was clear to us how to best live up to that mission—we needed to improve the health and wellness offerings in our community. With that in mind, we made a conscious decision to provide area residents with convenient, inexpensive, and accessible ways to address obesity,

Key Board Takeaways

As lifestyle-based health problems become an increasing burden on healthcare and lead to rising healthcare costs, governing boards should:

- Access the health needs of their community, including community members' health behaviors that may affect their overall health.
- Enlist the help of community partners to devise a response plan.
- Ensure that all new programs and services created in response to this plan are in line with the organization's mission, vision, and values.
- Be aware of the costs of these new programs and services and the effect they will have on the organization's overall financial health.
- Create measurement systems to clearly demonstrate the results of new programs and services.
- Be receptive to community members' feedback on new programs and services to allow for continued improvement.

exercise regularly, and treat or manage long-term health conditions.

In 2015, we started by opening the 85,000-square-foot, \$22-million Columbus Wellness Center. The hospital built the Wellness Center and the local YMCA signed a 10-year lease for the facility's fitness section. This has allowed the YMCA to offer its health and fitness programs alongside our wellness and rehabilitation services. In an effort to better utilize the Wellness Center, we formed a joint wellness

committee to prioritize programs and classes that would best serve our community.

Some examples of these programs are the Ask the Dietitian program, healthy cooking classes and the Walk with a Doc program. Ask the Dietitian gives community members the opportunity to interact with hospital dietitians in weekly, hour-long classes on topics like healthy eating, weight loss, diabetes, and heart health. In our healthy cooking classes, hospital dietitians teach

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community members healthy recipes in hands-on courses held once a month. In the free, monthly Walk with a Doc program, healthcare providers share information about health and wellness topics while they walk with community members. Each of these programs are designed to promote healthy eating and physical activity to address the concerns noted in the health rankings and community health needs assessments.

Implementing the Complete Health Improvement Program

To further address the health and wellness needs of our community members, we implemented the Complete Health Improvement Program (CHIP), a lifestyle enrichment program designed to reduce disease risk factors through lifestyle modification. The goal of CHIP is to lower participants' blood cholesterol, hypertension, and blood sugar levels and reduce their excess weight through improved dietary choices, increased daily exercise, enhanced support systems, and improved stress management techniques.

CHIP courses are offered in 18, one-hour sessions over three months. In these sessions—which are facilitated by hospital staff—participants learn about positive lifestyle changes through entertaining, educational video sessions and discussions. After successfully completing the program, participants can also receive ongoing support through “Club CHIP,” a support group that meets monthly.

In June 2016, the hospital started offering CHIP to employees free of charge because we wanted to provide employees with additional lifestyle improvement resources. Since then, we have expanded the program to offer it to local businesses and community members for a small fee. We've been pleased with the results. More than 150 people have participated in the program over its past nine sessions, with roughly 15 community members participating in each session. Combined, participants from all of the sessions have lost more than 1,300 lbs. The total average weight loss per session is 150 lbs. with some participants losing almost 30 lbs. on their own. We have also seen similar positive results with participants' blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels.

Empowering Community Members to Manage Their Health

Despite CHIP's demonstrated results in Columbus, we believe the biggest benefit of the program isn't reflected in the numbers themselves. As Luke Lemke, M.D., local physician and CHIP facilitator explained, “I think the success of CHIP that we've seen so far is probably better measured by how people feel...It's really the fact that we're educating and empowering people to take more control of their own health.”

We often think of health as something determined by our genes alone, but CHIP stresses that genes are just one component of health and

that by making healthy decisions, you're able to gain more control of your health outcomes. “In CHIP, we like to say genetics load the gun, but lifestyle pulls the trigger,” Lemke said. “We're trying to educate people that your genes are not your destiny. You do not have to be a victim of your genes.”

Lemke believes by empowering people to take charge of their own health, it not only benefits them, it benefits the community and our healthcare system at large. We are seeing unprecedented rates of chronic diseases in our country, but by addressing some of the root causes of disease—such as lifestyle choices—we are able to improve the health and wellness of our communities and decrease overall healthcare costs. “We have the best health system in the world. It's just that there are things people do, lifestyles, that create unhealthy people,” he said. “So, if we start addressing lifestyle changes...those things will benefit people. And really, that's what the whole program is about...learning how important your lifestyle choices are into your eventual outcome.”

Danielle Frewing, B.S.N., RN, Director of Occupational Health Services at Columbus Community Hospital, oversees the administrative side of CHIP. She has been impressed by how community members are actively taking charge of their health after participating in CHIP. “People are more aware of their health and they're excited about it and they're very engaged,” she said. “We often think of health and wellness as what we eat and how often we move, but there are so many other things that are important to our health: our social relationships, whether we're getting enough sleep, gratitude and forgiveness, and CHIP addresses all of those things.”

Prioritizing the programs and services that were needed most gave us the opportunity to offer long-term solutions for community members—changing the health of our community for the better.

Overall, we have found CHIP to be a great educational tool for our community members. As our CHIP facilitator, Kelli Thomazin, PA, explained, “CHIP really empowers people to understand that everyday decisions, even small decisions, can make a huge impact over a prolonged period of time. These little changes can end up making big differences in peoples’ lives.”

Long-Term Solutions and Measurable Results

By implementing these programs Columbus Community Hospital has been able to address the recognized health needs within our community. Community health surveys have shown marked improvements in area residents’ perceptions of our community’s health and wellness offerings. In 2011, 65 percent of our county’s residents said they believed our community had adequate health and wellness activities. In 2017, that number rose to 76 percent.

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The Governance Institute thanks Michael T. Hansen, FACHE, President and CEO of Columbus Community Hospital in Columbus, Nebraska, for contributing this article. He can be reached at mthansen@columbushosp.org.