



Children's Mercy Hospitals and Clinics – Kansas City, MO Building a Culture of Wellness

In 2013, Children's Mercy Hospital (CMH) was awarded the Gold Apple for the exceptional changes made to their food environment, including: advertising only healthy foods, offering a discounted wellness meal, and removing sweetened beverages from vending machines. What few people know is that this Gold Apple grew out of a culture of wellness that was seeded there by senior leadership many years before. Today, CMH's employee wellness committee is multi-disciplinary, meets monthly and led by a full time staff member whose primary responsibility is to implement their wellness initiatives.



The Take CARE Wellness Program

The Take CARE Wellness Program is CMH's extensive wellness initiative and includes behavior change programs, team challenges, onsite exercise classes, and telephonic coaching. It also includes an onsite employee wellness center to provide primary and urgent care for employees. CMH leadership ensured that goals for a healthy food environment were included in the strategic plan for this program. Several changes were made to the cafeteria and vending machines which culminated in CMH's Gold Apple award this year. Leadership has ensured sustainability for this program by adding it to the medical plan budget and hiring a full time staff person to oversee implementation.

Photo: CMH employees strike a yoga pose at an employee wellness event.

Focusing on the Future

CMH joined forces with the Partnership for a Healthier America and signed a Healthy Hospital Food Commitment to provide healthy food and beverage options to all employees and patient visitors, including removal of all sugar-sweetened beverages. These remarkable changes were supported by senior leadership who were willing to subsidize any resulting short term profit loss. It is their way of stating that food makes a difference in people's health and wellbeing. CMH's culture of wellness runs deep. They were willing to accept short term financial loss in order to invest in more important long term gains their employees' health and happiness.

Focusing on Employee Engagement

CMH understands that employee participation is a critical component of any wellness initiative. This is why CMH extensively markets their wellness events and activities through daily e-news, monthly newsletters, posters and managers' emails. A points based program sweetens the deal since employees and their spouses/domestic partners can earn "wellness" points for participating. These "wellness" points can then be applied to their health reimbursement account (HRA).

Tips from Children's Mercy Hospital

- **Get senior leadership commitment** as soon as you can—it could make or break your wellness efforts!
- **Form a wellness committee** so change can happen from the top down, but get ideas from the bottom up by asking those you serve.
- **There is no substitute for asking:** do a needs assessment with your employees, don't assume you know what those needs are
- **Social support is key:** involve spouses or other family members in wellness activities