



# Centers of Excellence Award Winner

## *Better Health for Employees Creates Role Models for Patients*

For more than 15 years, Children’s Mercy Kansas City has invested in a comprehensive wellness program to help employees improve their health, and in turn, be good role models for the children and their parents that they serve. Over time, Children’s Mercy Kansas City has emphasized healthier food and beverage choices, incentivized physical activity, encouraged employees to learn about lifestyle and health issues and modify behavior, and serve as positive role models of living healthy for patients, families and the community.

In recognition of its long-term commitment to improving health for employees, patients/families and the communities they serve, Children’s Mercy Kansas City recently was presented with a 2019 *Healthy Kansas Hospitals* Centers of Excellence Award by the Kansas Hospital Association.

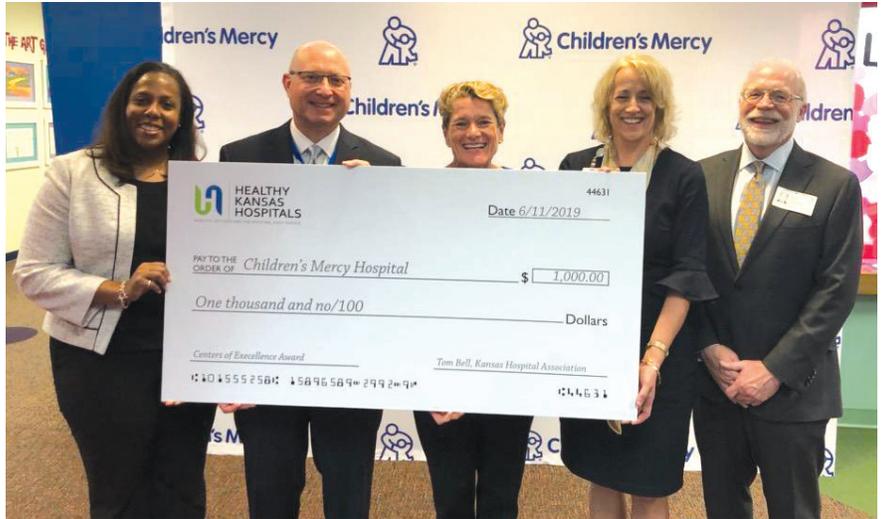
“This award means a great deal to us,” said Paul Kempinski, M.S., FACHE, president/chief executive officer. “Health care is shifting to bettering the lives and improving the health of the community at large, and we are very committed to that role. Recognitions like this give us some sense of the progress that we’re making, and we are very proud to receive this award.”

“I’m proud of the 8,000 employees throughout Children’s Mercy – including the thousands based in our Kansas facilities – who contribute to this work every day, not only improving the health of the communities we serve and the patients we care for, but also taking care of themselves as well, because healthy caregivers will be better caregivers,” Kempinski said.

### Wellness Committee Tackled Weight Management

While Children’s Mercy created a committee in the 1990s when the wellness movement was gaining momentum, it went dormant for about 10 years until 2004, when Sarah Hampl, M.D., and some of her colleagues resurrected it. “I’m a pediatrician and work in the area of weight management. I know the importance of employees being role models for children and parents,” she explained. “We need to be healthy for ourselves and to be able to show patients and parents how to live healthy lifestyles. The healthier we are, the better we are able to take care of the kids and families we serve,” she said.

Meeting monthly, the employee wellness committee planned and implemented a hospital-wide campaign called “Children’s Mercy on the Move,” modeled after “America on the Move,” a nationwide initiative that set goals about healthy eating and active living. “Our goal was to get employees to take 2,000 more steps a day and cut 100 calories day,” Dr. Hampl said. The occupational health department at the hospital and the wellness com-



Children’s Mercy Kansas City received the prestigious *Healthy Kansas Hospitals* Centers of Excellence award recently for its long-term commitment to improving the health of its employees, patients/families and the communities it serves. Tom Bell, far right, president and CEO of the Kansas Hospital Association, presented the hospital with a check for \$1,000 to be used in its wellness program. Pictured left to right are Marshaun Butler, vice president of clinical support services and Children’s Mercy Hospital Kansas operations and chief diversity officer; Paul D. Kempinski, FACHE, president and chief executive officer of Children’s Mercy Kansas City; Candice Gwin, employee wellness program manager; Carolyn Ehlers, senior director of compensation, benefits and wellness; and Bell.

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— Sarah Hampl, M.D., Pediatrician, Children’s Mercy Kansas City

mittee sponsored several campaigns to promote healthier lifestyles, including “Lighten Up” campaigns in 2006 and 2007.

“We had support from the hospital CEO and the executive vice presidents team to implement these initiatives, along with the director of nutrition services. This helped get things get off the ground and re-energized the wellness committee,” Dr. Hampl recalled. The next step was partnering with an outside organization to host on-site health coaching for employees and on-site fitness classes.

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## Healthy Employees Are Role Models

Candice Gwin joined Children's Mercy Kansas City in 2008 as employee wellness program manager. "Candice was the spark that lit the fire," Dr. Hampl said. "She had experience working with employee health in another large health system, and really took off with things from there. The wellness committee has been meeting monthly since Candice came on board."

"Candice has got an incredible sense of passion and dedication to wellness in her life – both personally and professionally. She lives it," said Carolyn Ehlers, SPHR, senior director of compensation, benefits and wellness. "She has had a long career in the wellness field. She is very outgoing and personable. She is perfect in the role of employee wellness program manager for us."

### Partnership for a Healthier America

"In 2012, Children's Mercy started emphasizing a culture of health," said Dr. Hampl. "Through the national Children's Hospital Association, we learned about the Partnership for a Healthier America, and saw what other children's hospitals were doing to improve the healthiness of food service. Many were not selling sugared beverages. We admired their work and thought we would like to do the same at Children's Mercy. The wellness committee worked on this, and kicked off the initiative in 2013," Dr. Hampl explained.

Collaboration between the wellness committee and the hospital public relations/marketing department resulted in the "Fill Better, Feel Better" campaign to kick off the initiative. A flyer and other promotional materials explained the PHA program and why Children's Mercy was participating.



Children's Mercy Kansas City offers classes to help caregivers learn about individuals' special needs diets, such as healthy eating plans for those with diabetes or celiac disease.

"Children's Mercy is so fortunate to have a terrific internal communications department, which is key to being able to communicate changes," Gwin said. "PHA was hard, and they did a beautiful job of communicating with employees and family advisory boards at least six months before changes were implemented. The buy-in from senior leaders was communicated to staff leaders and employees as well as family members. We had tremendous internal support from the communications team. The changes still were painful, but not a surprise," she explained.

In addition to stopping the sale of added sugared beverages in the hospital, many food service-related changes were implemented to meet the PHA standards, including:

- **Food marketing:** By July 1, 2013, only health-promoting food options were displayed in advertising/pictorials in the cafeteria or general service patient menus.
- **Healthy check-out:** By July 1, 2013, only health-promoting food options were displayed within five feet of all cash register stations.
- **Children's wellness meal:** By July 1, 2013, the hospital offered a minimum of one child's wellness meals in the cafeteria and on the general pediatric patient menu daily.
- **Nutrition labeling:** All items available in the cafeteria and general service patient meals at point of purchase/service were labeled with calories per serving by July 1, 2014.
- **No fried foods:** In 2015, Children's Mercy eliminated all fryers from its hospitals.

Through PHA, the hospital had to meet a number of criteria in addition to the activities outlined above. Some dealt with ingredients, such as limits on the amount of sodium in foods. As expected, there was push-back, especially on the elimination of added sugar beverages and fried foods. "We did it in a thoughtful way. We didn't prohibit employees and parents from bringing in sugared drinks. We as a hospital just don't sell them," Dr. Hampl explained.

***"Senior leadership's support was crucial in helping make this initiative a success. When employees and visiting families expressed frustration because they couldn't purchase a 'regular soda,' senior leaders remained committed to our efforts."***

*— Candice Gwin, Employee Wellness Program Manager,  
Children's Mercy Kansas City*

The food service staff took the brunt of the complaints since they were the individuals unhappy purchasers saw first. "We can't thank our dietary manager and his staff enough for how well they handled the conversion and dealt with the aftermath. They had to shoulder a lot," Dr. Hampl said.

"Senior leadership's support was crucial in helping make this initiative a success," said Gwin. "When employees and visiting families expressed frustration because they couldn't purchase a 'regular soda,' senior leaders remained committed to our efforts."

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## Healthy Employees Are Role Models

Dr. Hampel reports it took two to three years to gain acceptance of the changes in food and beverage services. “Now there is an expectation that we would promote health at the hospital,” she said. “Beginning with new employee orientation, they hear about it. We have continued to promote the partnership through stories on our internal website for employees.

### Fill Better, Feel Better at Children’s Mercy CMH JOINS THE PHA & MAKES THE HOSPITAL HEALTHY FOOD COMMITMENT

Children’s Mercy is one of only nine children’s hospitals in the country to join the Partnership for a Healthier America (PHA) and make the Hospital Healthy Food Commitment.

The PHA is a nonprofit organization devoted to bringing public, private and nonprofit leaders together to ensure the health of our nation’s youth by solving the childhood obesity crisis.

Through the Hospital Healthy Food Commitment, hospitals meet nine requirements to deliver nutritious and affordable food and drink options to patients, families, visitors and employees.

In total, there are 17 partners representing 155 hospitals, making the Hospital Healthy Food Commitment the most expansive effort ever to improve nutrition in America’s hospitals.

“This nationwide initiative is a great fit for us,” said Randall L. O’Donnell, PhD, President and Chief Executive Officer. “We’re recognized for advancing and delivering optimal pediatric health care. We are viewed by many as a role model in our community. We care about the health of our patients, families, visitors and employees. And, we promote a culture of health for our patients, families, visitors and employees.”

“As pediatric health care providers, we are very concerned that four of every 10 school-aged patients we see for check-ups are overweight or obese,” said Sarah Hampel, MD, Medical Director, Weight Management Program. “This initiative helps us set a good example for our patients and families.”

Children’s Mercy’s PHIT Kids Weight Management Clinic anticipates a 39 percent increase or 1,300 visits in 2012.

“The Hospital Healthy Food Commitment also is positive from an employee perspective,” said Candice Gwin, Employee Wellness Program Manager. “Sixty two percent of our employees are overweight or obese.”

“People make food choices based on foods readily available to them,” said Karen Cox, RN, PhD, Executive Vice President and Co-Chief Operating Officer. “As a leader in children’s health care and a major employer in the Kansas City area, Children’s Mercy is making the healthy choice the easy choice for our patients, families, visitors and employees.”

**THE HOSPITAL HEALTHY FOOD COMMITMENT**  
Children’s Mercy will meet all nine requirements of the Hospital Healthy Food Commitment within the next three years through its new campaign called “Fill Better, Feel Better.”

“Children’s Mercy has a jump start,” said Bill Barkley, Director, Food Services. “We put three of the practices in place even before joining the PHA.”

Three of the nine healthy practices in place at Children’s Mercy today include:



“When we’re in the hospital with our child, we do everything we can to keep him comfortable and happy. The last thing I want to do is deny my son the soda he wants with his dinner! Simply avoiding temptations altogether with healthier options really takes a burden off of parents. I think this is an important change and one that Children’s Mercy should be proud of.”

- Kelly Ranallo, Family Advisory Board Member, Children’s Mercy Hospital



“It’s been quite a few years since we implemented the dietary changes. While some folks remain frustrated by it, all understand the true meaning, and understand the value of the behavior we show our patients and families,” Ehlers said. “After educating a patient on his/her diabetes diagnosis, it’s important to provide options that follow the plan of care. Just as important, we should eliminate the things that go against what you’ve just learned.”

## Fitness/Education Expand

Since the hospital began offering health coaching and on-site fitness classes in 2004, Children’s Mercy Kansas City has taken its Take CARE Wellness Program to the next level to help employees engage more fully in wellness and in life. In July 2018, the hospital changed wellness vendors. RedBrick Health, the new wellness program administrator, offers more than 60 self-paced, digital “journeys” to help employees and covered spouses learn about health topics that inspire healthy actions. Online self-paced modules are available for topics such as stress management, blood pressure, stretching and lifestyle-related changes individuals can make. The modules are educational and actionable. For example, the stress management program teaches stress management techniques you can do at home, and encourages participation in yoga or meditation. Individuals and their health plan-covered spouses earn wellness points for completing these “journeys.” Since each employee and covered spouse has a unique log-in, the vendor is able to track participation and completion of all programming.

In response to employee feedback, hospital senior leaders approved plans for an on-site Employee Fitness Center which opened in November 2018. Children’s Mercy Kansas City provides fitness classes as well as discounts for employees to use the facility.



Children’s Mercy Kansas City employees participate in on-site Pilates classes.

In the fall of 2018, the hospital participated in an eight-week Children’s Hospitals Challenge through RedBrick. Employees and covered spouses competed against Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia and Boston Children’s Hospital for bragging rights. Participants tracked physical activities, nutrition choices and overall well-being activities. “Children’s Mercy came from behind to win,” exclaimed Gwin. “Equally impressive is that 2,000 employees – 25 percent of our population – participated in the challenge,” she said.

“Our employees love teams, so through most challenges, we try to give options to compete individually or as teams. It’s ‘my department’ versus yours. Employees can check the internal leader board and see where they stand. They love it. It’s motivating,” Gwin said.

While most activities are done with RedBrick, some one-time activities are staged by the wellness committee. Children’s Mercy sponsored an indoor triathlon, and participants earned a sweat-shirt. “We try to incentivize in different ways,” Gwin said.

Children’s Mercy Kansas City works to keep wellness in the spotlight. Each monthly Human Resources Leadership Forum, open to all senior leaders, begins with a five-minute “Wellness Moment” in which Gwin covers a health topic, typically in the form of a tip, leads a stretching exercise and spotlights a wellness program or benefit.

Since Kempinski joined the organization in November 2018, he has been very supportive of wellness initiatives and is an active participant in the Take CARE Wellness Program, leading by example, Gwin noted.

## Raising the Bar on Creating Incentives

Offering incentives for employees to participate in wellness activities is pretty common. But Children’s Mercy Kansas City goes far beyond the typical t-shirts and gift cards. The Take CARE Wellness Program offers a comprehensive program of educational opportunities, physical activities,

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## Healthy Employees Are Role Models

nutrition choices and healthy lifestyle/wellness initiatives – all tied to employee health benefits. That’s really walking the talk!

Employees and their spouses covered under the hospital’s medical plan each can earn up to 400 points per year by participating in the organization’s well-being programs. These points then are converted to dollars in their health account for the next plan year, and can be used to pay the employee’s responsibility of a processed health claim or expense. These wellness points are above what the hospital already contributes to each employee’s account, and the points/dollars carry over from one year to the next if unused.

“This has been key to getting engagement from employees, and that has been one of the goals from the beginning,” Gwin said. “Children’s Mercy hopes that as people engage in wellness, they not only earn wellness points that convert into dollars in their health accounts, but also get healthier along the way. For some people, money is the motivator; for others, they just enjoy the activities. I hope that somewhere along the line, they get hooked and start enjoying them and will continue to do it for that reason,” she explained.

To “unlock” the wellness points earned, employees and covered spouses must participate in no-cost health assessments and health screenings so they can track their numbers from year to year. The health assessment is an online questionnaire completed through RedBrick. The health screening includes a blood draw with basic target markers such as glucose and cholesterol levels; blood pressure; and height/weight. Provided free of charge to employees and covered spouses, the short biometric screening may be done through the individual’s personal physician, at the hospital wellness center or through on-site appointments with a local screening company. While the individual receives the results of both, the hospital only receives an aggregate report from the wellness vendor, protecting individual employees’/spouses’ privacy.

Participation is high, according to Gwin. In 2018, 78 percent of Children’s Mercy Kansas City employees and 54 percent of covered spouses completed the health assessment. Some 72 percent of employees and 53 percent of covered spouses completed the health screening.

According to the most recent health assessment and health screening results reported by former wellness vendor StayWell Health Management, from 2017 to 2018 Children’s Mercy achieved \$212,800 in estimated avoidable health care costs and \$426,700 in avoidable indirect costs. Most impressive is the fact that 21 percent of employees participating in the Take CARE Wellness Program since 2012 have improved their health risk status.

Many may wonder why Children’s Mercy makes such a significant investment of resources in employee wellness. “With our focus on mission-based, family-centered care which Children’s Mercy is known for, we take care of the child and his/her family. We meet family needs while meeting the child’s needs. It is a staple of our perspective – it’s how we think,” explained Ehlers. “Extending our service of care and opportunities to employees goes along with helping employees be healthy so they can provide exemplary care to our children.”

### Take CARE Wellness Program Grows and Expands

“As our hospital continues to grow and expand its services, so will the Take CARE Wellness Program,” Gwin said. Online and telephonic coaching continues to expand, offering disease management and maternity management coaching. Ergonomic education and equipment are available, as well as no-cost smoking cessation programs.

“Working at a children’s hospital is stressful, so we try to augment stress-relief activities by offering meditation classes, two behavior health therapists



Yoga in the nearby park promotes relaxation and fitness.

based in the wellness center and a robust employee assistance program,” Gwin noted. Weight management, proper nutrition and a growing diabetic population affect the U.S. population, and Children’s Mercy Kansas City is taking steps to respond. “We have partnered with our on-site Employee Wellness Center primary care clinic physicians to provide a diabetes prevention program targeting those with pre-diabetes, and are looking to expand these services with the help of the center’s new registered dietitian/diabetes educator,” Gwin explained. In addition, tools and resources, including an online program, are in the works.

### Making Kansas City a Healthy Place to Grow Up

“Being a leader in children’s health care means doing our part to make sure the Kansas City region is a healthy place in which to grow up,” Gwin said. Children’s Mercy Kansas City engages in meaningful programs and opportunities to improve the lives of children beyond the walls of the hospital. One example is the hospital’s weight management program where children receive care from a team of clinical and academic experts that include registered dietitians, exercise physiologists, pediatric psychologists, education coordinators, social workers, pediatricians, nurses and nurse practitioners. The weight management program is part of Kansas City’s Center for Children’s Healthy Lifestyles & Nutrition. In partnership with Children’s Mercy, the University Kansas Medical Center and other academic institutions, the center supports the community’s collaboration in pediatric obesity research.

“Children’s Mercy partners with families, children and teens to create actionable plans to help them achieve and maintain a healthier weight,” Dr. Hampl said. Care is provided through a team approach to promote health. Weight management program educators participate in community events such as health fairs and conferences for children, adolescents and adults.

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Amy Stucky and therapy dog Hope participated in one of Children’s Mercy Kansas City on-site walks.

“Lifestyle medicine is under recognized but very important to prevent diseases, like obesity,” said Dr. Hampl. “It would have a major impact on our health systems and society if we could lower the incidence of diabetes, stroke and heart disease, which can be related to healthy lifestyles.”

Healthy role models are important to show children there are simple things that do make an impact over time. Parents also learn from the healthy behavior hospital employees model. “Kids don’t have as much choice. They don’t buy the food and beverages brought into the home,” Dr. Hampl pointed out. “This makes it so important that the hospital model behavior and help parents make changes at home so kids will have opportunities [for good health].”

“Our vision of the wellness program is to improve the health and well-being of our employees by developing a strategic, integrated and sustainable employee wellness program,” Gwin said. “My hope is that as our employees improve their own health and well-being, they will be better able to take care of the patients and families we serve. If employees and patients/families take home what they learn and use it, their sphere of influence will increase the number of people affected,” she added.

### LESSONS LEARNED

Hospital wellness advocates shared what they have learned from their involvement with Children’s Mercy Kansas City’s long focus on wellness and improving employee health.

- **Wellness is a journey** – it’s something you have to work on every day, Gwin noted. “While we think we’ve got a comprehensive program and make a great impact on our population, we have to continue to grow and evolve as best we can to improve the health and well-being of our employees.”
- **Administrative support is essential**, according to Dr. Hampl. “Administrative buy-in is key,” she said. “You have to have the support of administration to make a long-lasting impact. Be persistent. If you get turned down, try to modify your proposal and go back,” she added.
- **“You have to look for champions in departments on the inpatient and out-patient side,”** Gwin concurred. “You have to provide multiple offerings to appeal to different people.”
- **“We could have done a better job of continuing to communicate the why,”** Gwin said. “We’re starting to recommunicate why we do this. There always is turnover in employees, patients and families.”
- **It takes time.** “Over time and with an understanding of why the decisions were made, acceptance has been achieved, and a culture that creates an expectation of promoting health is emerging,” Dr. Hampl said.
- **It all works together.** “You need ongoing activities, communication, positive messages and positive reinforcement to keep wellness top-of-mind,” Gwin said.

#### About Children’s Mercy Kansas City

Founded in 1897, Children’s Mercy is one of the nation’s top pediatric medical centers. With not-for-profit hospitals in Missouri and Kansas, and numerous specialty clinics in both states, Children’s Mercy provides the highest level of care for children from birth through the age of 21. *U.S. News & World Report* has repeatedly ranked Children’s Mercy as one of “America’s Best Children’s Hospitals.” For the fourth time in a row, Children’s Mercy has achieved Magnet nursing designation, awarded to only about 8 percent of all hospitals nationally, for excellence in quality care. Its faculty of more than 700 pediatric subspecialists and researchers across more than 40 subspecialties are actively involved in clinical care, pediatric research, and educating the next generation of pediatric subspecialists. Thanks to generous philanthropic and volunteer support, Children’s Mercy provides medical care to every child who passes through its doors, regardless of a family’s ability to pay. For more information about Children’s Mercy and its research, visit [childrensmercy.org](http://childrensmercy.org). For breaking news and videos, follow us on Twitter, YouTube and Facebook.

#### About Healthy Kansas Hospitals

The *Healthy Kansas Hospitals* initiative was federally funded through the Kansas Department of Health and Environment Bureau of Community Health Systems FLEX Program. The Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility (FLEX) program is managed by the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy, Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The Kansas Hospital Association is a voluntary, non-profit organization existing to be the leading advocate and resource for members. KHA membership includes 222 member facilities, of which 125 are full-service, community hospitals. Founded in 1910, KHA’s vision is Optimal Health for Kansas. For more information, go to [www.HealthyKansasHospitals.org](http://www.HealthyKansasHospitals.org).