

# Centers of Excellence Award Winner

## *Small Changes Add Up for Edwards County Medical Center*

**E**dwards County Medical Center Chief Executive Officer Jim Hansel had a plan to implement a worksite wellness program when he took the helm of the 12-bed Critical Access Hospital in western Kansas in 2015. He selected two employees to serve as co-chairs of the Worksite Wellness Committee along with the human resources manager, and met with them weekly to plan and launch the program.

“We want to be sure our employees are healthy – physically and mentally,” he explained. “Our employees are here to take care of people in the community, so the hospital needs to take care of its staff members.”

“If we don’t live it, how can we expect the community to adopt it?” he asked. The hospital and its employees should be role models for the community in terms of good health.

“There are very few things that you can invest in that are more important than people. We’re creating a partnership with our employees by showing we care. As a result, we’ve seen a tremendous decline in employee turn-over. We have built a lot of trust,” he said. “Showing that we see the value of healthy employees helps the community see that value too,” he added.

Through the Worksite Wellness Committee, the hospital is providing employees with the tools and resources to improve their health. Policy changes and incentives for employee participation have produced tangible results, particularly in staff morale. Employees are enjoying healthier food and beverage options and using the on-site fitness center more frequently. Over time, these changes hopefully will result in improvements in the health of staff members.

***“If we don’t live it, how can we expect the community to adopt it?”***

*— Jim Hansel, CEO, Edwards County Medical Center*

In recognition of the hospital’s work to reduce sugary beverages, offer more fresh fruits and lean meat options, provide healthier snacks and flavored waters in the vending machine and incentivize physical activity, the Kansas Hospital Association has presented one of two 2019 *Healthy Kansas Hospitals* Centers of Excellence Awards to Edwards County Medical Center in Kinsley, Kansas.



Edwards County Medical Center received the prestigious *Healthy Kansas Hospitals* Centers of Excellence award recently for the hospital’s work to provide employees with the tools and resources to improve their health, plus a \$1,000 check to help support its wellness activities. Pictured left to right are: Worksite Wellness Committee members Jordan Sones, coder; Brandi Wheaton, physical therapy assistant; Jim Hansel, chief executive officer; Monique Funk, radiology technician; Lisa Stuckey, physician assistant, certified; and Celeste Schroetlin, coder.

Other wellness committee members – both current and past – not pictured include Krystle Jacobs, director of human resources and marketing; Brandi Burkhart, medical laboratory technician; Jackie Dvorak, occupational therapist; Becca Venters, business office; Taylor Hobbs, IT assistant; Cindy Stiebe, RN; Shala Miller, dietary aide; Darleen Burkhart, RN; and Chole Prieto, executive assistant.

“We are honored to be recognized with this award,” Hansel said. “We didn’t initiate our wellness focus for the purpose of winning an award. Promoting wellness is part of serving our community,” Hansel noted. “It’s humbling to see our hospital and community recognized for doing the right thing.”

Worksite Wellness Committee Co-Chair Brandi Wheaton said her group’s focus was on making employees enjoy working at the hospital. “It’s nice to see our hard work recognized,” said the physical therapy assistant. Committee member Krystle Jacobs, director of human resources and marketing, also was surprised by the recognition. “Brandi [Wheaton] and I can’t believe we won – there is so much we want to do,” Jacobs said. “I guess lots of little things add up,” she continued.

### **Workwell Kansas**

Soon after Hansel created the Worksite Wellness Committee, its two leaders went for training through the Workwell Kansas initiative. Several businesses, including BlueCross BlueShield, had come together to figure out what was missing in the workforce. A study of the Kansas population revealed

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employee turnover and burn-out and a lack of morale to stay in a job. These feelings were in part associated with lack of physical fitness and emotional well-being. The research led to the development of the Workwell Kansas program, designed to help businesses create healthy work environments.

Edwards County Medical Center's Worksite Wellness Committee focused on implementing some of these programs, beginning with smoking and the use of tobacco products. Initially, the hospital updated its policy about using tobacco products to prohibit their use on campus.

"That got the ball rolling," said Wheaton. From there, the committee moved on to food and beverages. While it was fairly easy to change access to food and beverages, acceptance proved more challenging.

### Food and Beverage Choices

As a partner in the Edwards County Health Organization, the hospital developed a "Healthy Food & Drink Choices" policy; the Chamber of Commerce-led organization receives state grant funding if local businesses make policy changes to promote healthier behaviors. The policy states that the hospital will work "to increase the availability of healthy food and drink choices for staff, patients, volunteers and visitors of Edwards County Medical Center." The policy also states: "Healthy food alternatives shall be provided during any situation in which the ECMC Dietary Department provides food."

For example, more lean meat alternatives, such as fish and chicken, are served. Many times, lunch came with cake or cookies. The wellness team requested that the dietary team offer fruit options for breakfast and lunch.

Vending machines were a challenge. Some of the chips, candy bars and energy drinks were replaced with nuts, protein bars, flavored waters, fruit juices and teas. "We didn't want people to riot and feel like we were taking away what they liked," Wheaton said. "Our approach wasn't about taking away items but offering choices," she explained. With a goal of reducing sugary options by 50 percent, Wheaton reports that "about 65 to 75 percent of the vending machine options are healthier," and when the healthy options are sold out, people ask when the machine will be refilled.

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— Brandi Wheaton, Co-Chair, Worksite Wellness Committee

### Take a Walk

Before the Worksite Wellness Committee was formed, the employees who became its leaders decided to do something about the trash blown onto the hospital campus by the strong western Kansas winds. The maintenance department fashioned trash pokers, and five or six people would take a walk during the middle of the day to clean up the grounds adjacent to the hospital. This reinforced the idea that employees would be interested in fitness activities.

The hospital provided free memberships to all staff and their families for the Atwood Wellness Center located on the hospital campus, but use from staff members was low. The Worksite Wellness Committee developed an incentive program to encourage more employees to take advantage of the facility. Another



Worksite Wellness introduces the

## Wellness Center Rewards Program

**\*\*Get Fit. Get Rewards.\*\***

- Work out for at least 90 minutes per week.
- Track your time on the employee sign-in sheet in the Wellness Center.
- At the end of each month, claim your prize!
- Start anytime. Each employee will be tracked individually.
- Grand Prize (after 12-months) is a pair of running shoes!
- Other prizes include massages, free meals, polos and more.
- See a Worksite Wellness Committee Member with questions.

Only three simple rules!

- 1) Workouts must take place at The Atwood Wellness Center.
- 2) Employee must work out a minimum of twice per week.
- 3) Employee must work out for a total of 90 minutes or more per week.

incentive was that employees could use the center during their twice daily paid 15-minute on-site breaks. If the employee stays on-campus, the breaks are paid, and staff members are encouraged to fit a quick work-out in – maybe a walk on the treadmill. If an employee takes advantage of six breaks per week (of 10 allowed), he or she is eligible for rewards.

Prizes – such as coupons for a hospital meal or on-site massage, polo shirt or gift certificates donated by local business – are awarded monthly based on the volume of activity recorded at the wellness center for the time period. For example, after one month of exercising 90 minutes or more per week, the employee qualifies for a free meal from the hospital cafeteria. The value of prizes gradually increases for the longevity of activity, and include "chamber bucks" to spend at local businesses, a hospital-embroidered jacket and coolers. For those employees who meet the criteria of exercising at the wellness center at least 90 minutes each week for the year, the grand prize is a pair of running shoes.

### Fun Fitness Activities

Since many Edwards County Medical Center employees are big basketball fans, the wellness committee started a "March Madness" fitness program hosted by the physical therapy department. Each employee fills out a basketball bracket;

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exercising is assigned for losses. The PT department keeps track of the brackets and assigns the minutes of required exercising based on the number of games lost. "It gets pretty competitive," Wheaton noted, explaining that more than 20 full-time staff members participated. At the end of the tournament, the individual with the least amount of losses is the "big winner," and the one with the most losses is the "big loser." Both winners received polo shirts imprinted with "March Madness Champion."

Bimonthly "challenges" help keep employees engaged in fitness and wellness activities. For example, one month the challenge was to drink half your body weight in ounces daily, so a person weighing 150 pounds would need to drink 75 ounces of water every day for the month. Using the honor system, participating staff members recorded their daily intake on a sheet in the break room, where they also could access fruits, like lemons and berries, and other garnishments, like mint or cucumbers, for their water. "Each week, we had a different recipe for infused water," Wheaton explained. "The water volume does not include coffee or tea," she added.

Increasing water consumption has many benefits, including clearer skin, flush of toxins, weight loss, energy boost and improved digestion, Wheaton explained. Doing this challenge during influenza season helped people avoid getting sick, she noted.



**January Water Challenge**  
Clearer skin • Flush toxins • Boost energy • Weight loss • Improve digestion

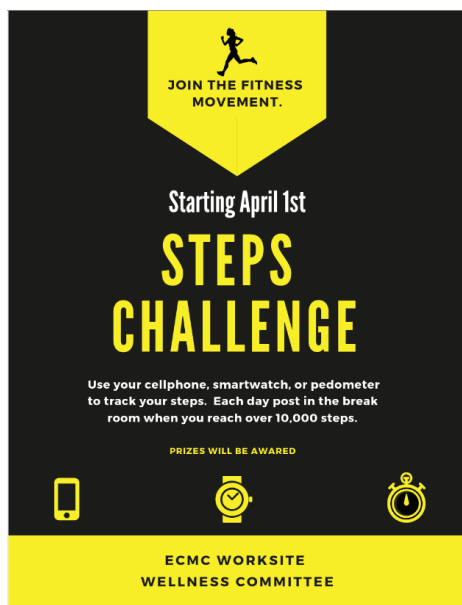
- Drink half your body weight in ounces every day.  
(Ex: 150lbs = 75 oz. of water)
- Fruit and garnishments for water will be set up in the break room daily.
- Track your daily intake on the sheet in the break room
- Multiple prizes will be awarded

Sponsored by the ECMC Worksite Wellness Committee



Multiple prizes were awarded for consumption and adherence to the program. "We should have tracked how much toilet paper we used," Wheaton quipped.

Another challenge involved steps. Since many employees wear a pedometer or other device to measure steps, they tracked and recorded steps more than 10,000 daily, with a drawing for prizes at the end of the month.




**JOIN THE FITNESS MOVEMENT.**

Starting April 1st

# STEPS CHALLENGE

Use your cellphone, smartwatch, or pedometer to track your steps. Each day post in the break room when you reach over 10,000 steps.

PRIZES WILL BE AWARDED



ECMC WORKSITE WELLNESS COMMITTEE

"Anything that is competitive gets people involved, even if the prize is only a t-shirt," Jacobs said.

### Connecting with Student Athletes

Through its Midway Clinic, the hospital offers pre-sports physicals for all junior and senior high school athletes. Student athletes receive required screenings on two specific days prior to the start of the school year. In addition, the hospital physical therapy department offers a free physical assessment of each athlete and a conditioning program. "They work on eye/hand coordination and balance," Jacobs explained. Each student leaves with a personalized exercise program for home and/or the hospital's wellness center, based on the assessment.

While the hospital makes the wellness center available to employees and their families at no charge, there are options for community members to have paid memberships. Because student athletes like to use the center in the summer and on school breaks, the hospital lowered the age for membership to 16. All members receive an orientation that focuses on how to use the equipment.



### Fun Days Raise Funds

The hospital also involves the community in some of its fun "fund-raising" awareness campaigns. For example, hospital employees went "gray in May" to raise awareness of brain tumors and brain cancers. All the staff wore gray clothing, and through social media, asked the community to wear the color with them.

May also is mental health awareness month, so everyone wore green on Green Day. Although routinely allowed to wear jeans on Fridays, jeans may



Midway Clinic staff members wore green to raise awareness of May being National Mental Health Awareness Month.

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be worn on these special non-Friday awareness days by making a \$5 contribution. The money then is donated to a local charity, such as Action for Alex, named in memory of Alex Gleason, who was a graduate of Kinsley High School. The Action group paints houses in the community in Alex's memory and works to improve buildings in the community.

### ECHO Takes Down Tobacco

The Edwards County Health Organization, which meets at the hospital, provides a forum to focus on community health. CEO Hansel and Jacobs, as well as physicians Dr. Walter Linder and Dr. Diederik Meursing, serve on the board, and the hospital works cooperatively with the community. Local high school students are involved in the RESIST Tobacco Task Force. A group of students picked up cigarette butts in the local park and put them in plastic bags. "Everyone was amazed at how many cigarettes had been smoked," Jacobs recalled.



The students took the evidence to the city council, which passed an ordinance to prohibit smoking within 25 feet of public parks. The students also visited convenience stores and other businesses that sell cigarettes and tobacco products and took photographs of where the merchandise was displayed. As a result, the city council passed another ordinance to prevent placement of tobacco products at children's eye levels and with products marketed to children, like candy. "ECHO and these students are trying to prevent youth from smoking and using tobacco products," Jacobs said.

### Using Financial Incentives to Change Behavior

While Edwards County Medical Center has used fun, creative activities and events to encourage employees to make lifestyle changes and healthier food and beverage choices, plans are being made to add a surcharge to the cost of health insurance for those employees and their spouses who use tobacco products. The hospital is working with its insurance broker and hopes to implement the surcharge program in 2020.

"Health care is such a stressful job," Jacobs said. "I feel like tobacco use is what they turn to for stress relief. They seem to go hand-in-hand." The hospital provides alternative ways to relieve stress, including free use of the wellness center and on-site low-cost massages.

The hospital encourages all employees and family members to take part in tobacco cessation classes and programs. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment offers materials and resources through its KanQuit! Program, including free medications, such as nicotine replacement patches.

### Maintaining Momentum

"Implementing changes into policies is one way we are assuring sustainability," Jacobs said. "Because these new ideas are in policies – like offering healthy food options, we know they will continue to be used and enforced."

When the Worksite Wellness Committee was formed, attendance was mandatory. "Now people ask to be on the committee," said Wheaton. "Committee members enjoy making employees happier."

While membership rotates to promote fresh ideas, the committee is firmly established. "The three of us [founders] could retire from the committee, and it would still go forward strongly without us," Jacobs said.

### Bicycle Rodeo

Another ECHO/hospital collaboration is the annual bicycle rodeo, held in conjunction with the end of school each year. ECHO works with local businesses to get bicycles and helmets donated for the drawing. Partnering with local law enforcement, the event includes bicycle safety instruction, and a skills course to teach children ages 4 to 11 about stopping and looking before crossing a road and watching out for pedestrians. Bicycle safety checks, tune-ups and tire pressure checks are performed.

— EDWARDS COUNTY —

## BIKE RODEO 2018

Sponsored by the Edwards County Health Organization

★ Safety Checks; Bike Tune-up; Helmet Safety; Learn New Skills; and More! ★



May 19th starting at 11am at the South Park in Kinsley. FREE. Ages 4-11 welcome.



Wellness Committee Co-Chair Brandi Burkhart works with a Bicycle Rodeo participant to get his ride checked-out.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Founders of the Worksite Wellness Committee shared some tips and “lessons learned” from their experience.

- **The committee should include a mix of people,** according to Jacobs. “We have some people who are known to be fit and go to the wellness center every morning. Others who are not particularly fit are on the committee. We have a mix of males and females, and all age groups. The committee is representative of the population at large, and at all levels of fitness.”
- **Explain why changes are being made,** advised Wheaton. “We had to explain why we were making changes in the cafeteria menu and in the vending machines. People resist change, but they are more accepting when they understand the rationale.”
- **Administrative support is essential,** both agreed. “Our Senior Leadership team has been supportive of the program since it was first implemented,” Jacobs said. “They encourage people in their department to join the committee, and allow time off from regular work duties

to attend meetings which are during the noon hour once a month,” she explained. “Our leadership team also showed support for the program in the annual budget,” Jacobs said.

- **Start small, but do something,** Jacobs advises. For Edwards County Medical Center, the beginning was the mid-day walk to pick up trash.
- **Food brings people together,** Jacobs pointed out. The hospital’s wellness committee meets over lunch. The three founders took turns cooking healthy lunches.
- **Listen.** Both Jacobs and Wheaton noted the importance of asking for feedback and listening to the input provided by committee members, employees and the community. Their CEO agrees. “We’ve taken a bunch of people talking about the small things that when combined make a big difference,” Hansel said. “Lots of people have ideas, and we need to listen. It shows that we understand this is a community endeavor.”

### About Edwards County Medical Center

Edwards County Medical Center is a 12-bed Critical Access Hospital (CAH), with a 10-bed geriatric/ psychiatric unit, located in Kinsley, Kansas. The hospital is proud to provide top quality care for Edwards County and the surrounding area. In addition to providing in-patient care, Edwards County Medical Center operates an emergency medical services (EMS) agency and an eight-bed acute long-term care swing bed unit. Convenient outpatient resources include radiology, laboratory services, physical therapy and cardiac rehabilitation. The hospital also has wellness and fitness centers. Contractual arrangements make specialized outpatient diagnostic services available, including mammography, MRI, nuclear medicine and sonography. The hospital owns Midway Clinic, a rural health clinic where eight providers deliver family medicine services. Through contractual relationships, Edwards County Medical Center offers regular access to specialists in areas including cardiology, general surgery, gynecology, podiatry, psychiatric services and orthopedics.

### 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).