



EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
MEDICAL TRUST

## Starting a Wellness Committee



*Well to Serve*



Wellness at work programs have been shown to decrease healthcare costs, reduce absenteeism, and improve morale and productivity.

If you have been thinking about starting a wellness committee to help put a program in place for your employees, you are not alone. More and more organizations are taking this step to put wellness initiatives into action. A dedicated wellness committee can help get your employees motivated and bring about healthy changes to your workplace.

Wellness committees can provide the structure you need to put certain programs into action, monitor the activity, and report the results. It also sends a message to employees that you care about creating a healthy work environment.

While putting together a wellness committee is not difficult, there are some things you should consider when beginning. On the next several pages are some topics to consider that will give your organization the best chance of putting together a goal oriented, employee centric, results-driven wellness committee.

To help you get started, we've included a sample email to your manager on creating a wellness committee at the end of this packet.

## **First Steps: Selecting Wellness Committee Members**



Selecting members for your wellness committee should be done very thoughtfully. The right mix of members will give you the best chance for being successful. The size of your organization may determine how many people should be on the committee. However, sometimes less is more. Too many people (more than 15) may take too long to come to a consensus before any work can get done. A committee that is too small runs the risk of a few people (less than 5) feeling over-burdened with too much work. Think about your organization and then determine the right number for what you would like to accomplish.

A good wellness committee should be a mix of employees from different levels of the organization. When there is a mix of employees from all levels it is more likely that everyone will feel they have a voice in the development of any wellness programs.

Having support (and/or participation) from senior management is key. Without this support a wellness committee may lose their momentum. If the committee has no support from the top, and no one to report to, there is less chance it will succeed. It is this scenario that can derail the committee and stop it before it gets going.

Every organization has “champions.” Champions are people who are optimistic, positive in their approach to tasks, and stick with projects to the end. They are personable and well respected by co-workers. Champions don’t have to be the most ‘fit’ people in your organization; their gift is their ability to motivate others and stay positive. Whenever possible, get “champions” in your wellness committee.

Now that you know what mix of people should be considered for a wellness committee, it is time to identify candidates and ask those individuals to step up and serve on the committee. Keep asking until you get the number of members you need.

## **Getting Focused**

Not everyone thinks mission and vision statements are important or necessary. However, they do provide clarity for the committee to help focus their efforts.

A simple definition of a vision statement is a broad statement of what you would like to do. A mission statement on the other hand tells why you have that vision and why the committee should be working on it'; in short, why it exists.

At the first meeting of the wellness committee, you may request the members write a 'vision statement' of what the committee would like to be for the organization. This will help them talk about what they have in mind and then come up with a vision they can share with all the employees.

Once a vision statement is agreed upon, writing a mission statement is the next step. A mission statement will further expand on the vision and state why the committee has been formed. This helps define the work of the committee and the overarching goal of the group.

## Next Step — Developing Goals Creating Goals



The next step is to create some goals to work toward and list the steps needed to achieve them. Goals should be measurable in some way, so the committee can determine if they have been reached. Sample goals include:

- Restructure meetings to allow for healthier meals (if meals are served)
- Plan for meeting breaks to encourage more movement and less sedentary behaviors
- Limit meetings to a certain number per day, or per week
- Offering walking/standing meetings as alternatives
- Keeping meetings to under 50 minutes

Whatever the goal, the steps to achieving it should be clearly stated and a time should be assigned to review the goal and see if it has been met. A report on the success of the goal should be written and shared with management and employees.

If the goal is to increase physical activity in the work place, your goals could be:

- Develop a walking program (walking at lunch)
- Increase employee use of the stairwells
- Introduce activity breaks into all meetings

The committee may come up with other creative ways to get employees moving. Whatever the idea, documenting steps needed to achieve it and how to measure it are just as important. If you can't measure the success, you will have difficulty trying to report it.

## Some Ideas for Programs

Most organizations have a meeting every day. What's typical in your workplace? Do you have lunch meetings? Do you normally have some food at most meetings? What kind of food? How long do meetings last? Are there regular breaks during longer meetings? Is some form of physical activity incorporated into the breaks? Do you ever have walking or standing meetings? Maybe changing your current meetings to 'healthy' meetings is something you may want to work on.

Do you have vending machines in or near your workspace? Do they offer healthy choices or only candy and higher calorie snacks? Could you get healthier choices added to these machines? Who supplies the machines and who orders the snacks for it? Maybe getting healthier snack machines is a good place to start.

Are there smokers in your workplace? Do you have a smoking policy? Do other workers have to walk through a haze of smoke when they walk outside? How many smoke breaks are workers entitled to each day? Are there incentives to help smokers become ex-smokers? Do your employees know about the smoking cessation programs in their health plans? Can you increase awareness of this benefit? Maybe a campaign to advertise smoking cessation benefits would be a kicking-off point.

Do workers take breaks and get up and move during the day or are they sitting for hours behind computers and being very sedentary? Maybe a “Sit For 57, Move For 3” campaign would benefit your employees. Encouraging your staff to take opportunities to walk a little, stretch a little or take a walk at lunch are great ways to move a little more during the workday.

In the spirit of moving more you may want to put together a walking program (the Medical Trust can provide you with a toolkit packet to put this type of program together). Is there a place where you can walk near your worksite? You might want to set aside a day a week for a walk at lunch. If walking isn't an option maybe you can use the stairs for some exercise. Start a competition to see who uses the steps the most.

Something that many companies do is to invite a group like Weight Watchers® to hold meetings at their organization. The classes are usually held at lunch so as many employees as possible can attend. Is this something your group could provide? It is important to advertise this event as much as possible and to continue to advertise it in emails or an organization's newsletter. Your company may wish to share in the cost of the program to encourage and support your employees. Cost sharing can range from 25% to as much as 100% if the participant attends 90% of the classes. Or you can choose not to provide any financial assistance but encourage all managers to allow and support their staff in attending these meetings.

If the attendees want to set a goal for a certain amount of weight loss to be achieved by the end of the program, it may boost the participant's motivation. (An attendance/sign in sheet should be provided at each session so that participation on a weekly basis can be measured.) Some companies provide a 'reward' at the completion of the program. An inexpensive reward could be a 'certificate' that indicates the person participated in a program where the combined group weight loss was \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the amount)! This type of program could be tied to a charity such as each participant donating 10 cents for every pound lost and the total amount is to be donated to a local food bank. A creative wellness committee can come up with any number of ways to sponsor a program of this type.

If you work in an area where there is not a safe place to walk, initiating a walking program may not work. Perhaps you could request that employees track their walking distances outside business hours and create a 'challenge' to see who can walk the most in one week, one month or during the course of Lent.

## Requesting Employee Input

If the committee is not sure what programs to enact maybe a survey of the employees would help the group make a decision.

If you are not sure what type of wellness initiatives your employees would like, ask them! There are a number of free surveys you can set up on the computer to poll your employees. A survey may provide you with a number of ideas for programs. It also allows all staff to feel a sense

of involvement in determining what types of programs the wellness committee will put into place.

When in doubt of where to start, a survey is a great beginning!

## Measuring and Reporting Your Results



Once you have established your goals and the steps needed to put it into action the committee should determine how much time it will take to achieve the goal and then assign a date when the committee will meet to review the progress achieved.

It is important to be able to report measurable results. For instance, if a Weight Watchers® program was initiated in your organization, it is important to report on:

- How many employees participated
- If participation remained constant throughout the length of the program
- Total weight lost
- If the group set a specific weight goal and met it
- If there is there interest in continuing the program

These are things you would be able to measure without employee feedback. However, if you want to measure employee satisfaction with the program you may want to do a brief survey to get feedback about the program. (Did employees find it helpful, what did they get out of the program, are they interested in continuing?) If there was a significant drop out rate, don't despair. Maybe the cause was not the program but the specific leader was not engaging or was not a good fit. Extend the program for another 6-12 weeks and request a different meeting leader. The flaw may be the presenter and not the overall program.

If the committee initiated a program related to healthy meetings:

- Are most meetings shortened to less than an hour?
- Are there activity breaks provided for longer meetings?
- Are healthier meals served?
- Have walking or standing meetings been attempted?

Whatever the goal, measuring and reporting results is as important as the wellness programs initiated. Reporting success is important but reporting the failure of a program is important as well. If the program failed, look to the causes and see what your organization can learn so that the next program will have more success. Again, be creative in putting these programs together.

## The Medical Trust is Here to Support You

### Sharing What You Are Doing

When you form your wellness committee please share your experience with the Medical Trust. What you create in your organization can inspire others throughout the Episcopal Church. By sharing with others what worked for you, how you put a program together, what resources you used, you are helping others to take the necessary steps to start their wellness committee. If we all work together we will help all of our employees be "Well to Serve".

## **Sample email to your Bishop/Principal/Director on creating a wellness committee**

To: Bishop/Principal/Director

From: Wellness Administrator

Subject: Creating a Wellness Committee at [your diocese/group]

In the spirit of supporting healthy lifestyles at work, I am proposing to start a wellness committee at [your diocese/group]. Wellness at work programs have been shown to decrease healthcare costs, reduce absenteeism, and improve morale and productivity.

A dedicated wellness committee can help get our employees motivated and bring about healthy changes in our workplace. I would like your support with this initiative and to move forward with forming a wellness committee.

A follow up meeting will be scheduled early next week to review this proposal and answer any questions you may have. By accepting the meeting you are sending the message that you are supportive of creating a wellness committee at [your diocese/group] and will provide ongoing support to make this initiative successful.

