



At MD Anderson, Wellness Starts in the Neighborhood



“It is vital to our mission that we provide as many of our workforce members as possible with opportunities to become and remain physically active while they continue in the fight against cancer.”

Bret J. Belfer, MBA
Director, Employee Wellness and Recognition
MD Anderson Cancer Center

More Information

MD Anderson Cancer Center
www.mdanderson.org

The Community Guide: Worksite Health
www.thecommunityguide.org/topic/worksite-health

The Community Preventive Services Task Force Findings
www.thecommunityguide.org/task-force-findings

Employee wellness is a difficult challenge for the MD Anderson Cancer Center, which has nearly 20,000 employees and more than 80 buildings at its Houston campus. William B. Baun, EPD, CWP, FAWHP, the center’s former wellness officer and a past president of the National Wellness Institute, led the charge for nearly 18 years with an innovative approach to reframe the center as a collection of unique neighborhoods. Each neighborhood has its own health needs and goals, and Baun’s team worked with each of them to find, adapt, and implement evidence-based approaches, including some from The Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide).

The Community Guide strongly recommends community-based health programs to encourage physical activity in the workplace. The Guide also recommends providing new or improved access to areas for physical activity, as some individuals may not have access to a gym or other health resources. Baun’s team used these Task Force recommendations as part of the framework for a campus-wide health improvement project with a focus on physical activity in the workplace.

Creating Neighborhoods

When Baun started with MD Anderson, he found that employees wanted a sense of community. He reviewed the literature, studied a map of the center’s campus, and determined there were actually neighborhoods throughout the center. He learned that each neighborhood had its own culture with its own health and wellness priorities.

“If we’re going to be successful in wellness, we need to understand not only that neighborhoods are different, but also that they have different ways of ownership,” said Baun.

Strengthening Ties

Baun worked with each neighborhood to generate buy-in among employees who felt a greater sense of ownership and motivation. Building neighborhood identities also strengthened personal connections and allowed people to feel more connected with their coworkers and the institution as a whole. The Community Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) recommendation for social support interventions to increase physical activity fit nicely with these ideas and provided evidence that could help justify neighborhood efforts.



Be Well Stations

Based on the Task Force recommendation for combining informational outreach with creating or enhancing access to physical activity stations, Baun worked with neighborhoods to create Be Well Stations with elliptical machines, scales, and stretch bands that employees could use between projects. Some neighborhoods took things even further by raising funds to install more elaborate fitness areas.

What is The Community Guide?

The Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide) is an essential resource for people who want to know what works in public health. It provides evidence-based recommendations about public health interventions and policies to improve health and promote safety.

The Community Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force)—an independent, nonfederal, unpaid panel of public health and prevention experts—bases its recommendations on systematic reviews of the scientific literature. With oversight from the Task Force, scientists and subject-matter experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conduct these reviews in collaboration with a wide range of government, academic, policy, and practice-based partners.

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 Community
Preventive Services
Task Force

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By creating access to places for physical activity and social interaction, the Be Well Stations provide employees a place to be active without straying too far from work. This ease of access combined with the community input promotes wellness on a daily basis.



On-Going Search for Evidence

Baun and his team followed developments from the Task Force by regularly checking The Community Guide website and subscribing to emails about new findings. “From a program planner standpoint, I can’t imagine people not waiting for Task Force findings to come out so they can see what’s new,” Baun said. “For me, [it’s important] to be able to look at that literature and the findings.” Having access to information about the systematic review—results and supporting materials—allowed him to consider whether intervention approaches could be expected to work for MD Anderson.

Lessons Learned

- **Set up neighborhoods or divide people into smaller groups when the overall population is large, diverse, or geographically separated.** Baun worked with neighborhoods to identify their health and wellness goals. He looked to The Community Guide for intervention approaches that could be expected to help neighborhoods achieve their goals, and adapted them to each group’s unique culture.
- **Be creative in your approach and make health fun.** One neighborhood decided to begin every meeting with a hula hooping activity.
- **Employee buy-in and collective ownership can make some of the biggest differences.** Culture changes that begin with middle management and individual employees are often more effective than those that are simply mandated by higher-level executives. Baun found that at MD Anderson, asking neighborhoods what was important to them was better than blanket strategies or a fitness center with expensive equipment.