



Creating a Culture of Wellness at your Retirement Community

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The term "wellness" is used in nearly every facet of the active aging industry. Consumers are driving the demand for wellness-based lifestyle options within every continuum of care in Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRCs). This demand is constantly increasing as members of the aging boomer population begin exploring their lifestyle options and taking a more proactive versus reactive approach to their health. This informed consumer understands the importance of nurturing the mind, body, and soul. For CCRCs, this means providing wellness-based lifestyle options through all continuums of care.

Creating this culture of wellness in your CCRC can feel like an overwhelming task. After all, a true community culture of wellness should encompass nearly every department, resident, and elemental procedure of your community's operations. It is important to take this culture shift in small steps and to evaluate how the various departments and programming pieces can all contribute in their own ways to this mission.

Creating a Culture of Wellness in Every Department

Finding the key personnel in each department that you feel could drive this mission is crucial for building a successful wellness advisory committee. Residents and staff alike will appreciate and embrace a collaborative approach to community wellness. The main players and organizers of daily and weekly activities will be your leisure services department, including all of their activities personnel and any fitness staff you have available. From the resident's perspective, the fitness staff is the main representation of wellness in the community. For this reason, and because of the nature of scheduling activities, the fitness staff and leisure services department will need to work together closely to ensure balanced programming and unified delivery.

Once you have the appropriate team members on board for the wellness advisory committee, you can utilize their passion to spread the mission to all employees. Read on to find out how specific departments play a vital role in the development of your wellness culture.

Marketing Department

What better tool could you provide to your marketing department than a vibrant and engaging wellness-based lifestyle for prospective residents? It's crucial to engage your marketing director in conversations around activities, events, and professional staffing connected to your wellness program so that they can be the voice of your unique program to future residents and their families. It's also important to gather feedback from the marketing team to determine how your wellness program is received by visitors.

Dining Services Department

The wait staff and personnel in this department have some of the most routine interactions with your residents of all departments on campus. Why not use this daily interaction to promote and demonstrate wellness-based living through healthy menu options? This department has the opportunity to greatly impact the health of residents through the nutritious foods that are provided as well as through conversations with the wait staff promoting events and healthy menu options. In addition, you can use on-staff Registered Dietitians to help cater to residents' individual nutrition needs and educate all residents on the dietary needs of older adults.



Lifestyle/Leisure Services Department

In addition to folding a theme of whole-person wellness into the programs your residents already know and love, your staff can coordinate innovative activities that challenge, inspire, and increase the confidence of your residents through new life experiences. They can also ensure that residents throughout the community are offered balanced programming that encompasses physical, social, emotional, vocational, environmental, spiritual, and intellectual wellness.

Administrative Services

People in this department routinely serve as the go-to people for residents and visitors with questions and concerns. They also manage a great deal of the behind-the-scenes planning and coordinating in assisting other departments' programs. This connection to residents and the community's daily operations makes these personnel integral players in a community's wellness initiative. Allow this close connection between your staff and the residents and guests to act as an information gateway in not only receiving valuable feedback from your residents regarding wellness programs, but also in encouraging your residents to become more involved.

Fitness Center Services

Current and prospective residents will view the fitness area as the backbone of any successful wellness program, just as many people consider physical fitness to be the cornerstone of personal well-being. Although you certainly do not want to put all of your wellness eggs in one basket, building a strong foundation for your program through adequate exercise amenities will facilitate the community's transformation to a culture of vitality.

Capitalize on the true opportunity your community fitness center offers. A state-of-the-art fitness center without the right people driving its success through professional staffing limits the facility's potential. A well-equipped fitness center contains senior-friendly cardiovascular equipment, strength-training equipment, and designated stretching areas. In addition, proper space and accommodations for group exercise is essential for a growing program. Also, a class schedule should be structured to provide group exercise options to all ability levels.

In addition to providing adequate space and equipment, exciting wellness and incentive programs aimed at motivating users and increasing participation should be offered throughout the year. These programs should be goal oriented based on your active aging population's wide array of interests and ability levels, and connected (when possible) to larger community initiatives.

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Resident Involvement

One last step your committee might consider is bringing residents onto your committee or creating a separate wellness committee of residents. Their valuable feedback and contribution to this mission can help guide future programs. In addition, this can provide you with the means to build wellness champions who have a sense of program ownership and who can become a powerful word-of-mouth marketing tool for current residents. They may also be capable of participating in some of the culture-shifting work. Empowering your residents to live a wellness-based lifestyle, and to help mold your community’s culture of wellness, is a win-win.

Next Steps

Creating a community culture of wellness can be a very exciting opportunity to improve the connectedness of your staff and residents, enrich resident lives through balanced lifestyle options, and create a key marketing tool for prospective residents. For starters, it will be very important to gather the right collection of your community’s key personnel who can discuss the needs and goals of your community’s wellness mission. From there, future campus-wide wellness initiatives and frequent wellness-based programming options can evolve over time. Involving residents in the wellness model’s decision process, as well as creating measurable outcomes for your programs, can help ensure that your program is striving to meet your community’s outlined goals and objectives. Taking these first small steps can help you make great strides toward creating a robust wellness culture in your community.

Campus Wide Involvement

Within a CCRC’s wellness program, the culture shift should invite participation not only from independent-living residents, but from residents and staff in all continuums of care. This can provide your potential residents the satisfaction of knowing that the lifestyle that is important to them as an independent-living individual will continue with them.

A nice starting point for moving to a community culture of wellness is offering some type of campus-wide initiative to encourage and promote wellness. This provides your staff an opportunity to take ownership in program development toward this common mission. This campus-wide initiative could be an incentivized program or team-oriented program to unite groups of residents. This will help spark interest among your residents in your newly outlined wellness-based offerings, as well as unite your staff in delivering the message to the residents.

Outcomes

As you begin creating your wellness advisory committee and putting ideas into motion, it is very important that you consider the outcomes you would like to achieve from your community’s wellness program in both the short and long term. Consider tracking the impact and effectiveness of your cultural shift with an initial survey that provides resident perceptions about the community’s culture. Similarly, it will be crucial to create measurable programs from which you can track participation data. This will not only help you discover whether what you are doing is working, but it will also help you discover areas of interest from your residents as you offer new programs. You can then use this data to guide you in future planning and to share successes with your residents.