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## Issues

### Mar 2009 Issue

#### Healthy workplace program promotes healthy living

By Akilah Dressekie

What's good for the public is also good for staff.

Health promotion initiatives at Rouge Valley Health System (RVHS) are helping to address health-related issues among staff, physicians and volunteers. The RVHS' model of a healthy workplace has three pillars: individual wellbeing, a healthy organizational culture and a healthy and safe physical environment. The initiative, called the Healthy Workplace (HW), program has a mandate to support the approximately 3,000 staff members at RVHS and is aligned with the hospital's strategic plan to focus on quality care, patient and staff safety within a healthy work environment.

Shelley Davie began her unique role as joint healthy workplace coordinator for RVHS and Lakeridge Health Corporation in east Toronto and west Durham region in 2006. Prior to this, the occupational health, safety and wellness departments at both organizations had engaged in strategic planning sessions to re-establish their service model as an integrated, high performance joint program. Creation of the new service model provided an opportunity to establish the joint healthy workplace coordinator role.

In order to address the first pillar of the HW model, individual well-being, the first step was to conduct a needs assessment. This included analyzing anonymous statistics, such as the usage of employee assistance programs, sick time, long-term disability claims and prescription usage. The results of this investigation showed the top health issues affecting staff. The next step was to create programs designed to offer solutions to those issues.

The health issues that the HW program now focuses on include gastro-intestinal issues; cardiovascular health; musculoskeletal health and mental health issues such as stress, anxiety and depression. Many of these issues, Davie points out, are interconnected. "Genetic predisposition aside, the solutions to resolving or preventing these health issues boil down to living a healthy lifestyle that includes not smoking, eating well, regular exercise, and good stress management," says Davie.

By utilizing Health Canada's calendar of Health Promotion Days, Davie has been able to focus on the issues that most affect RVHS staff, and offer programs that align with those particular months. And because her research has shown that many of the staff's health-related issues are interconnected, she is able to design initiatives to support staff in making lifestyle changes throughout the year.

The program's initiatives include: information booths in areas frequented by staff on health-related issues, blood pressure clinics, seminars, wellness fairs, a HW Intranet page with a vast array of resources, and an innovative tool that enables any staff member to safely and successfully initiate their own on-site wellness program.

Last March, during National Nutrition Month, occupational health staff visited front-line staff in their units for 15-minute talks that covered issues such as eating for shift work, weight management, and eating healthy on the go. They also took along a cart full of nutrition-related materials including recipes for staff to pick and choose from. This was a collaborative effort with the corporate dietitians and all information offered was vetted by them. "This style of initiative has been very successful as we are able to meet directly with staff in their own workspace, connect with them, offer information and answer questions," says Davie.

In an effort to reduce workplace-related injuries, RVHS has also introduced a Musculoskeletal Injury Prevention Program (MIPP), which also includes a dedicated specialist. The MIPP specialist's role will be to educate staff in each unit about the proper usage of assistive devices such as ceiling lifts, and how to use proper body mechanics to prevent musculoskeletal injuries. The program is currently in its early stages, but will focus on continuous education to prevent workplace-related injuries.

So far, Davie says that response to the HW program has been very positive. Many staff members are taking



Ryerson nursing student Janice Chen checks an RVHS staff member's blood pressure. This recent blood pressure clinic is part of the Healthy Workplace Program's health promotion initiatives for staff.

responsibility for their health by implementing wellness programs, sharing healthy recipes or organizing running and walking groups during the lunch hour.

*Akilah Dressekie is a Communications Specialist with the Rouge Valley Health System.*

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