

Wellness team helps reduce stress and fatigue, promotes mindfulness for physicians and staff

BERKSHIRE HEALTH SYSTEMS

Berkshire Health Systems (BHS) is a full continuum community health system in Western Massachusetts. The system includes two hospitals, Berkshire Medical Center and Fairview, each with their own Emergency Department (ED) as well as a Satellite Emergency Facility in North Adams. The BHS Wellness team serves BHS' roughly 5,000 employees with over 200 programs throughout the year. This includes annual screenings, health risk assessments, and debriefing after adverse events, as well as workshops on nutrition, exercise, and other wellness topics.

Challenge

In 2012, BHS identified burnout, compassion fatigue and secondary stress as significant work health issues. They sought a solution that focused on mindfulness and met staff where they were in terms of workflow.

Action

After a randomized trial using Kripalu Yoga-Meditation showed promising results, BHS implemented a 10-week mind, body, spirit program called Effort and Ease. The program was first offered to physicians, chief nurses, and senior leaders at the hospitals. Since then over 200 staff members, including ED staff, have participated in the weekly 90-minute classes aimed at building resiliency. Classes include writing and didactic learning as well as meditation, breathwork, and yoga stretching practices. Participants are also given tools to reduce stress they can implement in their workday and at home. Effort and Ease is taught by a member of the Wellness team who is both a Kripalu Yoga instructor and a licensed mental health counselor.

The Wellness team at BHS also recognizes that providers' busy schedules often prevent them from seeking out self-care programming. That's why staff is taught to find

quick and simple ways to practice mindfulness. Whether that is utilizing time staff takes to wash their hands or walking through a doorway mindfully, staff are encouraged to take a deep breath, roll their shoulders and reset their minds for the next task at hand.

The Wellness team also comes out to the units. They set up a relaxation station in the break room with stress management cards, hot tea, and soothing music. A mindfulness coordinator also visits break rooms to walk staff through a quick three-minute breathwork exercise. Another way the Wellness team works to incorporate wellness into staff members' workflow is to partner with managers to bring workshops to staff meetings.

At a systems level, BHS has implemented a particularly innovative wellness policy. They have eliminated all soda and sugar sweetened beverages as well as artificially sweetened beverage in hospital cafeterias. There are now more filtered water stations and the cafeteria coolers are filled with healthier beverages.

Keys to success

- Senior Leadership support: The primary reason wellness programming has been so successful is senior leadership's support of the mission and understanding of the need for this work.
- Wellness as a service: Another contributor to the Wellness team's success has been the ability to contract their services out to business in the community. This allows BHS to recoup some of their investments on staff.