



Case Study: Employee Wellness Program Promotes Engagement

Overview

There's a counterintuitive reality in healthcare work. While healthcare professionals care for and counsel patients on healthy behaviors, they often don't follow their own advice. Typically, caregivers work long shifts, are on their feet most of their days, and – particularly since the emergence of COVID-19 – have endured significant chronic stress. Employers who provide opportunities for relief and gestures of support can earn employee loyalty and engagement.

The Wellness Wagon

It's common for employers to offer a fitness benefit, through which an employee is reimbursed for a gym membership. Employers like hospitals, though, have been challenged to be more creative, and to meet employees where they are, which, often, is at work. In my mid-sized community hospital, a member of my team suggested a Wellness Wagon, to be staffed mostly by volunteers, that would travel to the nursing units and other areas of the hospital, promoting wellness during the workday. We launched the wagon with a flurry of communication on various internal channels sharing the reasons why leadership believed it was important, advocating for selfcare. The Wellness Wagon began rolling through departments, playing soft music and offering servings of intentional teas (no coffee), healthy snacks, standing back rubs or reiki, and passing out cards with affirmations and tips for quick wellness activities that could be accomplished while working. The Wellness Wagon volunteer would always thank employees for their dedication to patients and each other. To acknowledge the hard work of offsite location workers, we developed a "virtual wellness wagon," with bags of treats and tea bags, wellness tips and affirmations delivered occasionally by my staff and other volunteers.

Results

The response to the Wellness Wagon was remarkable. At first, there was much eye rolling among stressed out and often cynical nursing staff, in particular. It was seen as mildly silly and not widely accepted. However, as the wagon rolled through departments consistently over several months, our volunteers began to notice that news of their arrival preceded them in departments, and nurses would call out to one another that the Wellness Wagon was in the department. Those who grouched about the lack of coffee began to ask for the herbal teas, and the thank yous became reciprocal. While this organization did not have the resources to regularly measure employee engagement, usage of the supplies on the wagon grew over time, feedback from employees was very positive and their leaders anecdotally noted improved morale and engagement.