Fitness Clinic integrates fun and health for results for children

For some children, an afternoon of playing the video game Dance Dance Revolution is simply a fun recreational activity. For patients at UW Hospital and Clinics’ Pediatric Fitness Clinic, bouncing around to the game’s lively music is not only an entertaining way to exercise but also a gateway to a healthier and more active lifestyle.

With childhood obesity rates skyrocketing in the United States today, health experts agree it’s time to take action to improve our children’s health.

“Nearly one in five children are obese or overweight,” said Paul Montague, director of the Pediatric Fitness Initiative. “It’s important for children to learn healthy diet and exercise habits when they’re young so they can carry those behaviors into adulthood.”

For over six years, the Pediatric Fitness Clinic has given children and their parents the opportunity to work with pediatric physicians, exercise physiologists and nutritionists to make sustainable lifestyle and fitness changes. Whether running on a treadmill, playing interactive video games like Dance Dance Revolution or biking on a virtual course, the clinic staff works to integrate fun physical activity into children’s everyday lives. Patients and parents also receive nutritional counseling to learn appropriate portion sizes and healthy diet choices.

The Pediatric Fitness Clinic also works with other community organizations to spread the word about pediatric health. Members of the clinic staff serve on the Activate America Coalition Task Force, which advises several YMCA of Dane County programs, and work with 12 different community centers on fitness and nutrition programming. The Clinic also takes Dance Dance Revolution to community events to show children that physical activity and fitness can be fun.

Many patients are referred to the clinic by their pediatrician or family physician, while some hear about the clinic by word of mouth from their physical education teachers, parents or television. The clinic provides charity care to a significant portion of its patients.

With nearly 300 new patients per year, UW Hospital and Clinics’ Pediatric Fitness Center continues to thrive, as does the health of the children who attend. Patients who attended the clinic for one year lost an average of 4.2 percent body fat and saw an 11.3 percent increase in lean muscle mass. Efforts are currently underway to construct a new Center for Youth Fitness, a $1.7 million addition to expand the current clinic and serve the growing number of patients.

UW Hospitals and Clinics, Madison

St. Joseph’s Hospital’s peaceful prairie inspires yoga classes

The early morning sun and the expanse of flowering prairie outside St. Joseph’s Hospital provide the backdrop for free Saturday yoga sessions for residents in and around Washington County.

The hospital’s peaceful country setting and the large stone patio outside the Garden Café created an ideal location for the hour-long outdoor “Yoga on the Prairie” classes. St. Joseph’s Hospital worked with the local Kettle Moraine YMCA to offer the free classes taught by certified hatha yoga instructors from the Y. An average of 36 adults arrive each Saturday at 8 a.m., ready in their loose-fitting exercise clothes and toting yoga mats. The mats go down on the flagstones as the instructor begins to gently instruct the yogis through the various positions.

“The hospital and the YMCA are excellent community partners because of our shared interest in health and well-
being. Yoga not only relieves stress and calms the mind, it promotes proper breathing and flexibility, and aids posture. The pleasant outdoor setting at the hospital is a perfect place for yoga," said Aaron Schmidt, associate executive director of the Kettle Moraine YMCA.

Yoga on the Prairie is just one of the most recent partner initiatives between St. Joseph’s Hospital and the Y.

St. Joseph’s Hospital, West Bend

Weaving lives together - at the mall

Fond du Lac residents are making greater strides in healthy living, thanks to a collaborative effort between Agnesian HealthCare and Forest Mall.

Dorothy and Les Rieder are two of many area residents taking advantage of the “Mall Striders” walking club, which is co-sponsored by Agnesian HealthCare and allows participants to exercise by lapsing the inside of the mall.

Les says they appreciate the healthy offerings. “It is important to have these types of programs because you only see your doctor if you get sick,” he says. “Here we can focus on wellness…get our blood pressure checked, talk to health care professionals and stay abreast of the latest health care information.”

As dedicated walkers, the Rieders come to the mall almost daily at 8 a.m., when the doors open. The exercise has helped each of them keep their high cholesterol in check. And, they add, it is just plain fun.

“Walking is important. It is the exercise we enjoy, and here at the mall it is convenient, secure and comfortable. We get to socialize with other walkers, plus it is a great way to start our day!” says Dorothy.

Agnesian HealthCare, Fond du Lac

Diabetes and Your Heart educational event

In honor of November being American Diabetes Month, Aurora Medical Center in Two Rivers hosted a seminar called “Diabetes and Your Heart.” Jillian Johnson, M.A., E.P.C., an exercise physiologist in cardiac rehabilitation at Aurora Medical Center, discussed “Exercise at Any Age.” Topics included the importance of proper exercise for heart health and diabetes management. A keynote speaker educated attendees on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of heart disease and diabetes.

Aurora Medical Center in Two Rivers

Wellness Works in West Allis – especially when you make it in fun

The sun was shining, the breezes were balmy, and excitement was in the air on the morning of August 16, for the first annual Wellness Works in West Allis run/walk.

A crowd of 250 people of all ages, including neighbors, friends, families and Aurora caregivers got involved in this fun-filled event, which included the 3.1 mile/5K route through the neighborhoods surrounding Aurora West Allis Medical Center.

Free post-race exhibits and refreshments were provided in the Healing Garden of the Aurora Women’s Pavilion, where prizes were awarded to the top three male and female runners with the fastest running times. Entertainment was provided by the band Live Radio, and raffle prizes were dispensed to lucky recipients.

As they strolled around the grounds enjoying their coffees, waters, fresh fruits and other treats, attendees were able to participate in health assessments and blood pressure screenings, visit exhibits hosted by Aurora pharmacists and complementary medicine practitioners, all while learning to integrate healthy lifestyle changes into their lives.

Aurora West Allis Medical Center, West Allis

Looking forward to a healthier Cumberland

For over three years, the Cumberland Memorial Hospital has been a partner in the Healthier Cumberland Coalition’s goal of creating a healthier Cumberland. This partnership has consisted of donating staff time, meeting rooms, reduced fees on lab work, etc. June 30, 2009 marked the end of the Healthier Cumberland Coalition’s three-year grant. The grant has focused on increasing fruit and vegetable consumption, increasing physical activity, and many other aspects of total health.

While they obtained a much smaller grant that will provide some funding, it will not provide nearly enough for the coalition to continue at the pace in which they have become accustomed to.

That is where the Cumberland Memorial Hospital has stepped in. The hospital has agreed to employ the Coalition coordinator and continue to supply the needed classroom space, lab work, etc. that the Coalition will need to keep up their pace. While this will be a greater financial commitment than it was in the past, the Cumberland Memorial Hospital is excited about the partnership and the fact that the Coalition has achieved sustainability after the original three-year grant.

We are all looking forward to a healthier Cumberland.

Cumberland Memorial Hospital, Cumberland
Innovative programs encourage healthier lifestyles

To tackle the weighty issue of obesity and lack of physical activity, Gundersen Lutheran, in collaboration with community partners, created Minutes in Motion. Participants in the free community-wide challenge were encouraged to move at least 30 minutes every day for six weeks. To build excitement, Gundersen Lutheran distributed weekly wellness tips and newsletters, and threw a celebration party with prizes. Last year, more than 3,000 participants clocked in with more than 3,780,000 minutes.

Gundersen Lutheran also sponsored several other wellness programs that encourage patients, employees and community members to optimize their health. Shoe Crew and the Gundersen Lutheran walking trails encourage regular exercise, Stress Less helps participants manage life’s everyday stressors with tools and tips on coping, and the 500 Club® and Winning Weighs® encourages healthier eating.

Health Trip — a community-wide wellness program

Health Trip — a community-wide exercise program engaging young and old — gets the Sauk Prairie community moving during the cold days of winter. The 16-week program, which runs from January to May, offers structure, support and information to nearly 600 adult participants as well as 600 school children annually.

Health Trip kicks off every year in January and works to get people into an exercise routine following the holidays, said Community Relations manager Amy Ryan at Sauk Prairie Memorial Hospital & Clinics (SPMHC). The hospital is a major sponsor of the event, along with the Sauk Prairie Community Center and a few area businesses.

SPMHC has been involved with Health Trip since inception more than a decade ago, according to Ryan. “We partnered with the Community Center to get it going as a wellness initiative, and it’s been so successful, we’ve seen similar programs start up in other communities,” she said.

During Health Trip, participants are challenged to complete 48 hours of exercise, 36 hours for those over 55 years old or with special health limitations. “For the 48-hour trip, it takes three hours of exercise per week to stay on track,” Ryan said.

They are also encouraged, rewarded and educated along the way. In January, the exercise program kicks off with a health fair in which SPMHC provides free cholesterol, blood pressure and glucose testing, along with massages and nutrition information.

Several free passes are provided to participants to use the Sauk Prairie High School pool, and SPMHC offers a special three-month membership to its wellness center. Additionally, local schools are open for walking and running.

At three points during the course of the 16-week Health Trip, participants turn in their exercise times and are rewarded with prizes for reaching milestones. A picnic in May allows all participants to celebrate their accomplishments together, while enjoying door prizes and a healthy dinner.

“Over the years, we’ve expanded the program into the grade schools,” said Ryan. “It gets youth out and exercising during recess.” The students record their activities and encourage their family members to become part of a family team.

Competing hospitals join forces for worthy cause – Kids Fest

Too often competition minimizes the potential for good to happen. With dollars and cents acting as blinders, sometimes working for the greater good gets lost in the shuffle. That is not the case for the health care providers in the Spring Green area. Each year, competing health care facilities lower their competitive gloves and join together to put the community’s wellness in the spotlight. Employees from Richland Hospital, Spring Green Medical Center, River Valley Medical Clinic, Sauk Prairie Memorial Hospital and River Valley School District work together to provide a free day of information and activity.

Kids Fest was held at River Valley High School April 12, 2008. More than 100 parents and children ages 5-12 participated in hands-on activities and learned about the importance of staying well. Health care and program professionals were available to talk about how to get started or how to stay active with kids. They also answered questions about a wide variety of concerns, obstacles and challenges parents and kids face. Healthy snacks and refreshments were provided and many of the stations had giveaways.
In addition, the River Valley District Wellness Committee will be hosted the 2nd Annual Jeanene King Memorial Fitness Trail 5k Prediction Run/Walk.

So what is a Prediction Run? It is a fun way to participate in a race no matter what your age or ability is. Winners were based on their predicted time, not speed. All you needed to do is guess, before the race starts, how long it would take you to run or walk 3.1 miles. Then, record it on your registration form. It didn’t matter if you took 15 minutes or an hour. The person closest to their predicted time was the winner.

All proceeds from the run went to the Jeanene King Memorial Fitness Trail Fund, a local non-profit fund set up to help the River Valley School district’s Wellness Committee with yearly maintenance and upkeep of the district’s fitness trail.

The Richland Hospital, Inc., Richland Center

Bellin Run reflective of health conscious community

Bellin Health’s efforts to promote health and fitness is reflected in record registrations (for the fourth straight year) for the Bellin Run, sponsored by the health system.

The race started in 1977 as a one-time event to celebrate an expanded hospital with an inaugural 880 registrants. Last year, 15,149 people registered for the 10K (6.2-mile) run. That record registration was surpassed this year as 16,746 people registered for the 33rd annual Bellin Run. It is the 4th largest timed 10K race in the nation.

Through the years, the Bellin Run’s emphasis on community health and fitness has been increasingly pronounced.

“It ties in with part of Bellin Health’s mission statement which encourages us to help steer individuals, their families and friends toward optimal health,” said race director Randy Van Straten, a Bellin employee. “Whether running, walking or using a modified wheelchair, participation in the Bellin Run is taking a step toward optimal health.”

About 93 percent of Bellin Run participants come from Northeast Wisconsin.

“That’s a lot of locals focused on health and fitness. We encourage them to carry this healthy experience with them throughout the remainder of the year,” he said. “Distance running requires training, making the Bellin Run a great springboard for incorporating healthy habits into people’s lifestyles.”

The Bellin Run has one of the nation’s highest race satisfaction scores, with 98 percent of poll respondents saying they would recommend the event to another person.

Running is one of the easiest activities an individual can do to improve his or her physical and mental health. A regular run or walk can help efforts to lose weight, fight disease and slow down the effects of aging. Running and walking also offer stress relief and help build confidence.

Bellin Health, Green Bay

Submit community benefit stories to Mary Kay Grasmick, editor, at mgrasmick@wha.org.

Read more about hospitals connecting with their communities at www.WiServePoint.org.