



Selling wellness from the inside out

Read on to learn what factors have proven essential to this continuing care retirement community's successful integration of wellness programming

by Amy Ostrolenk, MA, RN, L. Andrew Morgan, and Diane Doster, MS

Enticing people to adopt an active, integrated lifestyle, even when programs and facilities are readily available, can be an ongoing challenge. Far too often wellness program participation is dominated by those who have been living optimally most of their lives—those who are already intrinsically motivated; not the less active people who are the majority within any population group.

At Asbury Methodist Village, a continuing care retirement community (CCRC) in Gaithersburg, Maryland, we have been serving older adults for more than 83 years, and delivering wellness programming for the past 15 years. While hundreds of our more than 1,300 residential and assisted living residents are involved to some extent, it is perhaps our expanded commitment to take wellness to the next level that has led to increased participation, improved outcomes, and an enhanced organizational identity. People now choose to live at an Asbury community with an expectation of “Living Their Best Life.”

The senior living industry's typical marketing messages imply that the time to move to a CCRC is when you get tired of cutting the grass or maintaining a house. These messages are being replaced with the more empowering message that life is about full engagement and purposeful pursuits. Asbury offers the perspective that when you feel opportunities are decreasing for full engagement in your current living situation, putting down unnecessary life tasks makes room for purposeful and meaningful living.

That is selling wellness from the inside out.

We offer a lifestyle that allows for and encourages a well-rounded approach to total wellness. Our goal is to identify a balance among six components of wellness—intellectual, social, vocational, emotional, spiritual and physical—as our team helps provide residents with programming choices to meet all of those needs.

In January 2009, Asbury joined forces with Sodexo's HealthAbility program to help us accomplish our vision and goals as a system of communities. We have since discovered that the following approaches are essential ingredients in our successful integration of wellness programming, and believe other organizations may benefit from what we've learned.

1. Leadership focus: total buy-in

At Asbury, we have come to realize "It takes a village to raise a child." In this case, the "child" is HealthAbility—our comprehensive wellness program. Elevating wellness to a place where it exceeds the walls of the fitness center or a single department truly requires a collaborative team approach.

Where many communities in the industry refer to their wellness committee, we have a "Lifestyle Team," which includes directors and managers across all service lines and dimensional areas. This team is invested in the success of HealthAbility and the residents who choose to participate.

There are, of course, certain staff members who play a larger role in the delivery of wellness programming on a day-to-day basis—including the fitness team, program director, and health and wellness director. But the Lifestyle Team has ratcheted up the involvement of others in the organization to new levels.

This committee takes ownership of the community wellness program goals and priorities for the coming year. They work together to deliver services, promote programming, and encourage residents to make the choice to live better. Additionally, this group makes time for hands-on help on a more intimate level, performing tasks such as functional assessments or being a wellness partner with a small group of residents. This depth of buy-in sends a message to residents and frontline associates. They not only hear leadership talking about why wellness is an organizational priority, but they also see this demonstrated on a visible and ongoing basis. The bottom line is that without total buy-in from leadership, wellness would have remained a singular department.

2. Employees matter

Asbury communities invest significant money and time in associate wellness for a number of reasons. One in particular is to lay the groundwork with associates who, if they benefit from wellness, can help boost a broader internal buy-in among their peers, family and residents. We knew associate wellness was the "right thing to do" and that it would impact our bottom line, but we also suspected that if employees were encouraged to take care of themselves, it would permeate into the residents' awareness as well. In this way, the wellness culture grows.

3. Applying six dimensions of wellness during the prospect stage

The marketing department at Asbury uses the six dimensional wellness model with prospects. When retirement counselors meet with prospective residents, they begin a discovery process that helps to uncover unmet and often unknown needs in all areas of wellness. These counselors help prospective residents examine their levels of engagement in their current situations. Once this is done, they connect these prospective resi-

dents to Asbury through a Priority Program, which is designed to expose future residents to our lifestyle. Under this program, prospective residents can participate in HealthAbility and other Asbury programs on a limited basis. The result is that when they move in, they do so ready to fully participate in all the community has to offer.

4. Frontline focus

All too often employees who have the most contact and the closest relationships with residents are not aware of or involved in promoting wellness. At Asbury, we chose to leverage this opportunity to reach more residents by making every associate a wellness ambassador. To facilitate this, we host wellness in-service training sessions for nursing, dining/food service, housekeeping, and maintenance departments. These sessions cover topics such as premature versus optimal aging, empowerment principles, and HealthAbility program specifics such as how to enroll. Additionally, we provide referral cards for our frontline champions to hand to residents so they can take the next step if they choose. This gives employees both a tool and specific action step, yet still leaves the responsibility and choice with the resident.

5. A health and medical platform

Our clinical services department for residential living administers every prospective resident's placement assessment prior to moving in. Staff in this department also deliver medical and health services to residential living residents in their homes. The director of health and wellness—a registered nurse with a master's degree in integrative medicine—takes advantage of the opportunity to educate and empower residents from a medical platform. Her medical credentials give her a certain clout, which she leverages to deliver holistic, integrated wellness mes-

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Mark your calendar

Interested in hearing more about how Asbury Methodist Village sells wellness from the inside out and uses internal outcomes to sell and promote wellness externally? Amy Ostrolenk, Andrew Morgan and Diane Doster will present on this topic at the Seventh Annual International Council on Active Aging Conference in Orlando, Florida. Among the things you'll gain from this seminar are multiple strategies to invite, excite and engage your residents or members. This session will take place on Thursday, December 3, 2009, from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. For more details, visit the "Conference" section at www.icaa.cc, or call ICAA toll-free at 866-335-9777.

sages and promote enrollment in HealthAbility. Her staff of more than 60 care providers has also learned to sing the wellness tune. As a result, the clinical services department reaches hundreds of residents who might not be enrolled or aware of the opportunity to enroll.

6. Using education, assessment results and personalized goals to inspire

To continually attract new participants to HealthAbility, we have found it important to schedule a recurring entry, or joining, point. This happens at the end of every 12-week semester. Our small group enrollment process includes an educational session called "Change the Way You Age," which shares age-appropriate research and defines wellness and the benefits of incorporating wellness behaviors.

A key approach to our education is to keep connecting the dots back to each person's core value—preserving independence and autonomy. When residents understand that they have a great deal of control over how they age, and that exer-

cise and healthy food choices are connected to this recipe for successful aging, their faces perk up. They are then more intrinsically motivated to take action.

The next action step includes completing a wellness profile, which is a fitness assessment as well as lifestyle survey, and personal goals using the six dimensions of wellness as a framework. Individuals receive meaningful information specific to their functional status and create a personal plan with a dedicated ambassador or coach. They also have a target date for a follow-up assessment to see their results, thus aiding retention.

The collective experience residents have when they join the HealthAbility program positions them in a more-likely-to-adhere place. When they succeed in attaining their goals, they tell their families, physicians and friends. And when these residents achieve meaningful goals that are tied to wellness, our associates are positively impacted—and wellness snowballs!

The aggregate outcomes help us sell "life success and potential throughout the life span" to residents on the sidelines, as well as the greater community.

7. Visual promotions

The key to continually promoting the opportunities to "Live Your Best Life" at Asbury Methodist Village is to tell the story using all available communication channels within the community. These channels include a live television station, a brochure and calendar, inspirational posters, and tabletop sign tents in the dining room and grill. The wellness visual with the most impact, however, is a monthly spotlight on a HealthAbility participant. Through each spotlight, we tell a story that inspires and gives hope to others, and also validates the person being showcased.

A good wellness program is a vehicle that enables a relatively few support staff to

have a positive impact on the lives of many. It requires a commitment and willingness to change or expand the role of staff; a heart for giving, and a strong desire to help others live life to the fullest.

At Asbury Methodist Village, we are pleased with resident participation and retention rates, and anticipate that our HealthAbility program will continue to grow and evolve. Our brand identity as a successful aging community also grows stronger—just like our residents. Most gratifying is the sense of purpose that shows on the faces and resonates in the voices of those who take charge of their own well-being. For us, that is the most valid indicator that our deliberation in selling wellness from the inside out is really working. ☺

Amy Ostrolenk, MA, RN, is director of health and wellness at Asbury Methodist Village in Gaithersburg, Maryland. Since 1990, Ostrolenk has served as director of nursing, director post-acute rehab, risk manager, and quality assurance nurse. Her holistic approach promotes the restoration and maintenance of optimal health and well-being and the prevention of disease. To learn more about Asbury Methodist Village or HealthAbility, contact Amy Ostrolenk at aostrolenk@asbury.org.

L. Andrew Morgan is director of sales and marketing at Asbury Methodist Village. Morgan has 14 years experience working in the retirement living industry. He is the developer and facilitator of "Selling the Wellness Model" marketing workshop, and cohost of "Rightsizing Your Home," a weekly radio talk show with a strong focus on purposeful living and wellness.

Diane Doster, MS, is national director of quality of life services for Sodexo Senior Services, headquartered in Simsbury, Connecticut. Doster has 12 years of industry wellness experience working with senior living communities. She currently supports Asbury Communities in implementing the HealthAbility wellness program systemwide.