



CHAMPS Staff Wellness Best Practices Podcast Series
Episode 1: Interview with Becky Wahl
From Community HealthCare Association of the Dakotas
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Yael Holzman Castellands: Hello, welcome to the first episode of the Staff Wellness Best Practices Podcast Series, produced by [Community Health Association of Mountain/Plains States](#), or CHAMPS. I'm your host, Yael Holzman Castellands, the CHAMPS Programs Coordinator for Workforce and Communications.

In this series we're highlighting interesting and innovative ways that Primary Care Associations [PCAs] and health centers in Region VIII are addressing staff wellness as a component of supporting employee satisfaction, engagement, and retention. We think the best way to share these ideas is to speak directly with the PCA and/or health centers who are providing these services and running these programs.

In our first episode, we'll hear from a Primary Care Association that has taken advantage of local grants to fund its staff wellness program. I'm so excited to welcome Becky Wahl from the [Community HealthCare Association of the Dakotas](#), also known as CHAD. CHAD is the bi-state [Primary Care Association](#) supporting health centers in North Dakota and South Dakota. Thank you so much for being here, Becky!

Becky Wahl: Thank you, I'm so glad to be here!

Yael Holzman Castellands: Yeah, it's great to have you! So, just to get into it, can you tell me a little about CHAD, the [community health centers](#) you support, and the communities they serve?

Becky Wahl: So, we are the bi-state PCA for North Dakota and South Dakota and we provide Training and Technical Assistance [T/TA] to health centers that are located in underserved and low income urban and rural areas across the Dakotas – and, they – who provide access to affordable quality health care for those that need it the most. The Dakotas network consists of nine health center organizations that provide care to more than 100,000 patients each year at 63 locations in 52 communities across North and South Dakota. We have three locations for our CHAD office, we have a location in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, Bismarck, North Dakota, and Moorhead, Minnesota, and we have 12 employees overall at CHAD.

Yael Holzman Castellands: Wow, that's great. And, could you tell me a little bit about your role at CHAD?

Becky Wahl: Sure, so I am the Director of Quality and Innovation and I have been with CHAD for nearly two years. Two of the main roles that I have in the organization, is the first being focusing on quality initiatives, so I work with our Clinical Quality Manager on multiple initiatives including behavioral health and SUD [Substance Use Disorder] or addiction medicine integration, our ECQIP [[Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes \(ECHO\)/Collaborative Quality Improvement Project](#)] project, which is – you know, focuses on different QI projects throughout the year. Oral health network we have also, and then recently we started a provider networking group that we hope to continue. And, then also help with our health centers on achieving PCMH [[Patient-Centered Medical Home](#)] recognition and through the annual reporting process. And then I also help to write grants in the organization and this includes the HCCN [[Health Center Controlled Network](#)] grant that recently came out, and then the Wellness Initiative that we'll talk about today, and then also work on getting

funds from state departments specifically for SUD treatment, training, and TA assistance that can go to the health centers.

Yael Holzman Castellands: Wow, that's great! So, could you tell us a little about the CHAD Staff Wellness Program that you kind of mentioned a little bit earlier, and how it got started?

Becky Wahl: Sure, so initially we had – our leadership in the CHAD organization is a big supporter of employee wellness, which is great to be a part of an organization that – where that is a high priority. Before we started going for these grants, we actually had a wellness hour, where weekly, staff were able to take an hour to go to the gym or participate in a wellness activity, and – using, you know, work time. And then we last year applied for a Work Well Grant with [Black Hills Special Services Cooperative](#) and we were funded for an ergonomics assessment, so we – really did an assessment, had an occupational therapist come in and do an assessment for our employees to make sure that their workspace was ergonomically appropriate. And then we also did some additional that weren't funded from the grants including nutrition, sharing recipes, providing a webinar on stress management, and then we did physical and a physical challenge and incentives and a water challenge as well. And then, the second year we actually applied again for the grant and were able to purchase Fitbits for staff that currently did not have a Fitbit and are currently in a challenge where we need to get 50,000 steps per week. From – it's a short incentive, or short program this time around – for July 8th to July 31st. So, in that 24 days they have to get an average of 50,000 steps per week and then the incentive will be to get a half a day off in August sometime, and then we'll just continually develop new incentives and new challenges throughout the year using the Fitbits.

Yael Holzman Castellands: Wow, that sounds so great. Could you tell me a little bit about what the biggest barriers you faced were when the program was first implemented, and then what challenges you might be dealing with now?

Becky Wahl: I think trying to get people engaged. In your life you either have wellness as a focus or not, and so sometimes the people who are not – don't have that a priority, there are so many other competing activities that they don't make the time for it or it's just something that they don't want to take the time to do. So, I think the biggest thing is just employee engagement and making it worth their time to, you know, start developing that habit and participating in the challenge. So I would say the challenges that we're dealing with now is just getting people who – you know, that's why we started with the slow challenge initially is to just get people used to wearing the Fitbit, you know, getting familiar with how to track their steps, how to print reports, and just getting in the habit of, you know, knowing what they need to do. You have to go above and beyond your daily routine to hit this goal, so it really is kind of an adjustment for your daily routine so, just trying to get people used to that in their daily lives.

Yael Holzman Castellands: Sure. And, did you have any issues with, like, with implementing the program when you have multiple office sites?

Becky Wahl: No, I think it actually brings people probably closer. You know, the multiple sites I think – overall, you know, having a challenge across sites is a benefit. I think the only time that there really was a challenge between offices was with the ergonomic assessment because the occupational therapist did an assessment in the Sioux Falls office and so instead of being able to come around and assess individual offices they had to do a

recording and then the staff in Bismarck and in Moorhead had to, you know, kind of do the assessment on their own with the guidance of the recorded assessment. But I would say that, you know, being able to use the Fitbits and just, our interaction, it really doesn't have a, you know, significant challenge across multiple offices.

Yael Holzman Castellands: Okay, yeah, and yeah, I totally agree, like, if there is a competition it can bring people closer together which is always nice especially since you do have multiple offices, so, yeah. Was there anything you tried that didn't work? And, if so, why not? And, anything that might work better now?

Becky Wahl: You know – I'm not, like, that it didn't work is probably not the right word – I think we had some – some things that we did that were more effective. I think the physical activity and the water challenges always seemed to be, you know, more received – you know, better received with it – with the staff. I think part of that is because it's tied to an incentive and so people really want to get that incentive. I would say like our nutrition, that – what we did there for a quarter was sharing recipes, and sometimes that got forgotten just with different priorities in the day. We also did a stress management, you know, webinar for staff and that was kind of hard to stay engaged. But really, I don't think that anything has been, you know maybe just not as effective as the physical challenges which is why this second year we really wanted to kind of hone in on that physical challenge aspect.

Yael Holzman Castellands: And do you partner with any other organizations in your community, or have you told anyone else in the community about the program?

Becky Wahl: No, we – it's specific to the CHAD employees at this time, but I have to say when I tell my family and friends about it, they are super excited and think it's amazing. You know, since we started this challenge we've had staff say, "I absolutely love my Fitbit," and they didn't think that they would even – you know something they wouldn't have gotten on their own and have really, you know, like, had to take that initiative like, "I was so close to reaching the goal so I had to just get up and walk around to get – meet my goal." So, I think people are excited about it, but as far as in the community, you know, at this time, really it's kind of a CHAD initiative, but when we tell other people they're excited about it, so.

Yael Holzman Castellands: Sure, yeah, I mean it sounds just so great. Do you plan on working with any other organizations in your community or are you just keeping it internally with CHAD?

Becky Wahl: I think, you know, if there's an opportunity to work with other agencies or community partners, we absolutely would look at doing that. I think, you know, at this time we just haven't had that opportunity and are just working internal development first, but we definitely wouldn't be opposed to working with community agencies, but we don't have any plans at this time.

Yael Holzman Castellands: Sure, okay. And I know you mentioned teambuilding a little bit earlier and people being held kind of accountable for their physical and emotional wellbeing with the program. Do you have a plan for recording the impact of the program at all?

Becky Wahl: We will be tracking – so we'll be tracking, you know, whatever – whoever is meeting, they have to track their steps throughout the activity period, and then we'll be collecting that, and announcing who met the initiative, who didn't meet the initiative, and providing the incentives according to that. And really, we hope to

see progression of physically activity. So, we started small – we started, you know, with a minimal amount of steps, but we want to see different things incorporated into that. It might be sleep, it might be, you know, just being active during the work hours. There's so many different things that we can do. So, I think, you know – keeping it – keeping that change element and that excitement element will be important. And then just, overall just seeing an improvement in our staff wellness overall.

Yael Holzman Castellands: Yeah, absolutely. And, what does the future of CHAD – of the program look like in general? I know you just mentioned it, but do you have any short-term or long-term goals at all?

Becky Wahl: No, I think what will be important moving forward is just that we, you know, develop new challenges based off of what worked and what didn't work and try to really get the employees' opinions on what they would like to see moving forward and then what they would like to see as initiatives and just keep building upon it. It would be great if we could incorporate other aspects other than the physical activity elements. You know, maybe there's more we can do focused around, you know, mental health or nutrition, so just kind of expanding beyond just the physical element of wellness.

Yael Holzman Castellands: Sure, yeah. And, what's your sustainability plan? Will you have to reapply for the grant at all?

Becky Wahl: We'll probably continue to apply for the grants because that just kind of gives us some additional money to do some of these activities as long as they are available. I think, you know, from here moving forward, you know, with our staff they all have a Fitbit but obviously there's going to be staff turnover at some point – it would be great if there wasn't but that's probably – the reality is that there will be, so we need to, you know, make that decision of, like, anytime a new employee comes in, you know, is CHAD going to continue to pay for those Fitbits – what that will look like. I don't think we've made that decision at this point but it's something that we will consider. And then, ergonomic assessments as well. Like, making sure that the new employees coming in are – have ergonomically, you know, appropriate desk space and a workspace. But yeah, just to keep wellness as part of what we do at CHAD and incorporate it into our daily activity.

Yael Holzman Castellands: Sure. And what advice do you have for other Primary Care Associations and health centers that are trying to incorporate staff wellness in their own organizations?

Becky Wahl: Keep it simple! And, dedicate time to it, because it's easy to let it go – get, you know, to the bottom of your to-do list but you have to make it a priority. And, making the incentives worthwhile, that really – having an incentive that the employees want is what makes them get up and do it, because people who don't have it in their everyday habits, it drives them to achieve that goal. So just finding out what would – what would they start out – you know, what would they need or what would incentivize them to get up and start, you know, meeting some of these goals because that really does impact the, the program. And just make it fun – have fun with it and create that friendly challenge. And, it really does, you know, build on the team, team – team building!

Yael Holzman Castellands: And then, and finally, are you doing anything with North Dakota and South Dakota health centers around staff wellness? I know you haven't really been, you know, sharing this program or

working with other organizations, but are you working with them around staff wellness to encourage them to be more engaged in the staff wellness sphere at all?

Becky Wahl: No, not at this time. I do think that this could have some impact, you know, we're an organization of 12 staff, that I think if you're a larger organization you really could learn from a smaller organization and what they've done and take some of this and implement, the more staff you have, the better impact, and the – the bigger impact that you will have. And I think, like, in a group purchasing environment, I think this could be beneficial as well, where – you know, you're – you're, you know, paying for health insurance for the staff and, you know, incorporating the cost that you put toward these incentives and towards your wellness program, the benefits that you're going to see from them, more than likely will far outweigh the incentives – you know, the money you put towards the incentives. So, I think, the bigger scale you get, when it comes to managing staff wellness would really – it could really have a big impact. You know, we don't have anything planned other than our small CHAD office at this time but willing to expand to, you know, whatever opportunities are out there.

Yael Holzman Castellands: Yeah, absolutely. Well, thank you for sharing that advice with our Region VIII Primary Care Associations and health centers. And, thank you for joining us today with our first episode of the Staff Wellness Best Practices Podcast Series.

Becky Wahl: Thank you for having me.

Yael Holzman Castellands: Yeah, thanks for joining us. So, this episode is available for free to download at CHAMPSonline.org, on our Events & Trainings webpage in the "CHAMPS Staff Wellness Podcasts" section. A typed transcription of this episode is also available. If you are interested in recording an interview for our series, please let us know by sending an email to me, Yael@CHAMPSonline.org. As always, thank you so much for listening!