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Tidelands Health Wellness Department: Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 4 in

Georgetown County

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Thesis Statement

The social determinants of health have a profound impact on the health of an individual. They influence the opportunities available to practice healthy behaviors, which can enhance or limit the opportunity to live a healthy life. In Tidelands Health Employee Wellness Department, the addition of an EAP Program promotes health and well-being for all with education programs. Through qualitative and quantitative data collection, I examine the impact of Tidelands Health and its EAP program on its employees' health.

The employee partners at Tidelands Health are offered many health resources through the Wellness Department. These resources are always available to all Tidelands Health employees. As part of the Wellness Department, any employee flagged by the HR department for higher A1C levels is offered one-on-one sessions with the company's dietician. The goal is to give employees the tools to reduce their BMI and improve any health conditions they are living with. Through analysis of data, Georgetown County was identified as having the most employees flagged for pre-existing health conditions. Not only were they flagged, but some employees were flagged multiple years in a row, indicating that their health issues did not improve with prior efforts. To address the barriers that prevent employees from making the necessary lifestyle changes, one-on-one interviews were conducted to examine whether barriers were related to an individual and their efforts, or if the barriers were out of one's control, like a lack of access to healthy foods.

Tidelands Health Wellness Department in Relation to the SDGs

The two main Sustainable Development Goals that the Tidelands Health Wellness Department encompasses daily are Goals 3 and 4, which are Good Health and Well Being, and Quality Education. The Wellness Department plays a significant role in the Tidelands Health community because they offer numerous services that support Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 4. The work Tidelands Health does daily is in efforts towards achieving goals 3 and 4. Goal 3 is ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all ages. Through their Employee Wellness program, Tidelands Health works towards Target 3.4, which is reducing non-communicable diseases. They do yearly lipid panels to test for elevated A1C and glucose levels, as this could indicate a disease like diabetes or heart disease. Target 3.5 aims to decrease substance abuse, which Tidelands health works towards by screening for tobacco and nicotine. Employees are incentivized to quit smoking through a rewards program that rewards them \$50 every year if they do not use tobacco or nicotine products. Target 3.7 aims to provide universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services. Tidelands Health rewards employees that go for their required doctor's visits, including having a mammography or colonoscopy done. The work Tidelands Health does also work towards achieving goal 4, which is ensuring quality education for all. They achieve this through their education program, which requires any employees flagged for elevated A1C or nicotine levels to attend. Employees are given the education to make better choices for their diet, to better their health.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) are 17 goals that all UN Member States have agreed to work towards achieving by the year 2030¹ The Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs, are goals adopted by all United Nations Member States that aim to achieve peace and prosperity for people and the planet. They recognize that ending poverty and other issues go together with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests. They include no poverty, no hunger, quality education, and good health for all, among others.

The underlying principle of the SDG Framework is that a country is not looked at as a whole area. Instead, it is looked at as a group of multiple communities living in one nation. Understanding the role of Tidelands Health in sustainability is important to understanding the role of healthcare in achieving the sustainable development goals across the globe.

¹ “Sustainable Development Goals.” NASA. NASA, May 3, 2022.
<https://earthdata.nasa.gov/learn/backgrounders/sdg>.

Overview of Georgetown County as it Relates to Sustainable Development

Georgetown County neighbors Horry and Charleston Counties. As of April 2020, the United States Census Bureau estimates Georgetown County's population to be 63,404. Tidelands Health serves the communities of Georgetown and surrounding counties. The University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute compiled data that compared Georgetown County to the South Carolina average, as well as to the best-performing county in South Carolina for each category. 30% of Georgetown's population is obese, compared to 29% across all South Carolina counties². Georgetown County's life expectancy is 76.1, compared to the national average of 77.5 and the state average of 77³. According to US news, 11.9% of Georgetown's population has diabetes, compared to 6.3% across the state of South Carolina. In terms of health behaviors, Georgetown County has a smoking rate of 19.3%, which is higher than the South Carolina rate of 18.9%. These risk factors are a small sample of the health risk factors Tidelands Health addresses daily by providing information to improve one's health. The population that is continually flagged for elevated A1C levels and existing comorbidities mainly resides in Georgetown County. The Wellness Department needs to adjust their approach to better serve the community it aims to help. The data illustrates that many in this population are elderly employees that find it difficult to make changes to their daily lifestyle.

² [SC Georgetown factsheet.pdf \(nichq.org\)](#)

³ "How Healthy Is Georgetown County, South Carolina? | US News Healthiest ..." Accessed May 3, 2022. <https://www.usnews.com/news/healthiest-communities/south-carolina/georgetown-county>.

Overview of Tidelands Health Wellness Department as it Relates to Sustainable Development

The work that Tidelands Health does in their community is a small piece of a larger puzzle in working towards sustainable development. The work done in Georgetown County may be hard to imagine on a larger scale because it is one county within one country, out of 195 countries in the world. However, the UN Sustainable Development Goals rely on participation within every country to achieve the global indicators, so every effort is important. While the work at Tidelands does not fulfil every target within Goal 3, the targets they do work towards make a tremendous difference in the health of their employees. Providing nutrition coaching to employees that were identified as having chronic conditions lowers the risk of non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment (objective 3.4)⁴. The work Tidelands does also impact the prevention and treatment of substance abuse (objective 3.5) through their EAP and tobacco cessation program. Seeing how the work of the Wellness Department has an

⁴ “Goal 3 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs.” United Nations. United Nations. Accessed May 2, 2022. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal3>.

impact on the surrounding communities puts into perspective the larger global impact of fulfilling the objectives of the SDGs.

Existing Literature

To understand the implications an employee health program has for its employees, it is important to examine existing literature on employee health and employee health interventions. In one peer reviewed journal, a study was conducted on the impact of a multicomponent workplace health promotion program. The article is titled “Impact of a Health Promotion Program on Employee Health Risks and Work Productivity” (Mills, 2007).⁵ Researchers found that participants who answered the pre- and post-surveys had lower health risks and higher work productivity after going through the health program. After the intervention program, seven out of the twelve assessed risk areas were reduced in participants. It significantly reduced risk status (changing from high risk to low risk) in the areas of alcohol consumption, nutrition, sleep, stress, physical activity, perception of general health and seat belt usage. Most of these issues are issues that Tidelands Health focuses on reducing as well, illustrating the positive effects of wellness programs in workplaces.

In another peer-reviewed article titled “A Systematic Review of the Health Impact of Employer-sponsored Wellness Programs”, the impact of a Wellness program on both employees and employers was evaluated through literature review and data analysis. In one study, 75% of participants in a workplace wellness program reported BMIs in the overweight or obese ranges,

⁵ “Impact of a Health Promotion Program on Employee Health Risks and Work ...” Accessed May 3, 2022. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.4278/0890-1171-22.1.45>.

which indicates the intervention was able to recruit and reach the desired population.⁶ Another study concluded that significant improvements in blood pressure, cholesterol, triglycerides, and glucose scores occurred in those participants with higher baseline classifications of these risk factors. Improvement in the highest risk level groups was likely achieved because of rewards points for modified selected high-risk behaviors. Evidently, incentives are important to increasing participation in these workplace wellness programs.

Future Recommendations

Based on my own observations and the results of the survey, I've included some ways the Wellness Program can be improved. The first suggestion is to improve intercultural competence in the workplace. With my supervisor, I attended a cultural workshop on increasing awareness of different cultures and reducing stigmas in the workplace. After this training, I noticed that employee culture was not regarded as highly as it should have been.

Another way the Wellness Program could improve is by improvising the health education programs in the workplace. I noticed that when some employees would come in for their education sessions, they often did not know what A1C, or glucose levels indicate. Because not every employee working for Tideland is in a healthcare position, like nursing, it is important to target education towards those people as well. The intern last spring created a newsletter for all employees, but it hadn't been updated since she created it. My suggestion would be to continually update the newsletter with healthy recipes, ways to stay active, and other things that might be useful to someone trying to stay healthy.

⁶ "Georgia State University ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University." Accessed May 3, 2022. https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1384&context=iph_theses.

Empirical Data

Tidelands Health serves the areas of Georgetown and Horry Counties in South Carolina, which includes Georgetown Andrews, and Pawleys Island. In 2017, Tidelands Georgetown Memorial Hospital received 77.0% of its inpatients from Georgetown County. Tidelands Waccamaw Community Hospital received 18.9% from Georgetown County. The total population of Georgetown County in 2019 was 53,676. Women slightly outnumbered men at 28,226. The largest population of Georgetown County was 65+ at 13,899. 33.1% of the population of Georgetown County has a BMI in the obese category with 17.2% affected by diabetes.

The Leading Causes of Death are determined by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). South Carolina's Top 15 Leading Causes of Death are listed, with Georgetown's top causes of death being heart disease, cancer, accidents, and strokes.

The 2019 Community Needs Assessment for Tidelands Health analyzed the top five health issues that Tidelands health must address in the communities. These include mental health, alcohol and substance use, obesity, diabetes, and cancer. In Georgetown County, poor mental health days are higher than the US median. The population to mental health provider ratio is worse than the state and US median. Suicide ranks #13 as one of the leading causes of death in the county. Male mortality rates from mental issues and substance abuse increased 54.6% from 1980 to 2014, and female mortality rates from mental-health related issues and substance abuse increased 241.7% from 1980-2014. In terms of substance abuse in Georgetown County, deaths from drug overdoses are higher compared to the state of South Carolina and the US median. Liver Disease is the #10 Leading Cause of Death in Georgetown County. Female liver disease related deaths are worse than the US average and increased 3.8% from 1980-2014, while male liver disease related deaths are higher than the US average. Obesity and diabetes were also issues

identified in Georgetown County, South Carolina. The rate of physical inactivity is slightly higher in Georgetown County than it is compared to the state average. Diabetes is the #7 Leading Cause of Death in the county. Diabetes, Urogenital, Blood, and Endocrine Disease Deaths are worse than the US average. Residents of Georgetown and Horry County are 11.3% more likely to have a BMI of Morbid/Obese compared to the US average, which affects 34% of the population. The last issue identified was cancer. In Georgetown County, the mammography screening rate is lower than the state average. Cancer is the #2 Leading Cause of Death. Tracheal, Bronchus, and Lung Cancer rates in women increased 70.8% from 1980 to 2014. The skin cancer rate in women increased 2.7% from 1980 to 2014, while the male skin Cancer rate increased 38.2% from 1980 to 2014. The most recent DHEC Georgetown County Cancer Profile shows that the incidence of prostate cancer is in the highest quartile for the state.⁷

Data Analysis

The data collected from the 2019 Community Health Needs Assessment is imperative to improving the health of the county. Of the health issues identified, Tidelands Health works to address some of them through its Wellness Program. The data collected for the survey was taken by employees, community members, and Tidelands Health student interns as well. All responses

⁷ Tideland's Health. (2019). "Community Health Needs Assessment and Implementation strategy". Retrieved March 28, 2022, from <https://www.tidelandshealth.org/app/files/public/fc3505d9-354e-4189-9d59-0d44ad7c841e/2019-Community-Health-Needs-Assessment.pdf>

came together to suggest areas of improvement in Georgetown County. The number of target responses for the 2022 survey was 2,000, which has slightly increased from past years. There must be a large number of participants for the data to be effective. Each issue that is identified through the needs assessment impacts the area of Georgetown in some way. That is the reason Tidelands Health designs various programs to implement strategies that improve these priority areas.

Conclusions

Improving the existing Wellness Program at Tidelands Health would be beneficial to its employees. Studies show that wellness programs benefit their employees by improving health conditions and decreasing the risk of chronic diseases. From my research at my internship, I found a link between an employee's home location and their health. Georgetown County had the highest incidence of elevated A1C levels, indicating that employees living in the county had the most health conditions. Using this, I conducted a needs assessment survey with employees to determine what changes needed to be made to support an employee's change to a healthy lifestyle. From my observations and feedback, I concluded that increasing cultural competency in the Wellness Program was crucial to having active participation. Another suggestion that was evident would benefit Tidelands is a focus on health education. Many employees did not have a proper understanding of nutrition and how to eat a healthier diet, despite being in a healthcare field. Because not every employee working for Tidelands is in a healthcare position, like nursing, it is important to target education towards those individuals as well. On a smaller scale, these improvements benefit Tidelands' health and the counties it serves. When applied on a larger scale, these changes work towards achieving better health for all in the state of South Carolina and across the globe.

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