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Healthiest Employers: The wonderful world of wellness

By Mindy Solkin – Guest Columnist
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It was the early 1990's and sports marketing was in its early stages. Nike's (soon-to-be) ubiquitous slogan, Just Do It, which had been created by an advertising agency in 1988, was starting to gain traction, and the second running boom was about to explode.

I was working as a marketing director for a fitness apparel manufacturer. This was perfectly aligned with my skill set of being a professional running coach and personal trainer, as well as a former fashion designer. One of my on-going projects was to publish our company newsletter and my "letter from the editor" column focused on health and fitness. The word wellness for most of the American population, was still in its infancy.

Being a trailblazer suited me fine, as I knew that one day I'd be ahead of the curve. Now, after decades of steady and sometimes explosive growth, the fitness business, a multi-billion-dollar industry, has been joined by the healthcare community to create a new paradigm. It's no surprise that this partnership has sprung up new careers and businesses that offer preventative care through wellness centers, a prehab philosophy versus a rehab model.

Job titles such as Health Coach and Wellness Director are burgeoning in the corporate and community-centric areas. These positions, almost unheard of just 10 years ago, usually consist of managing staff, implementing strategies, and having a passion for planning programs that benefit the health, fitness, and well-being of employees, patients, and clients. Professional fitness associations, such as the American Council on Exercise (ACE) offers a Health Coach certification which is accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA). It's a home study course with a rigorous exam.

The Medical Fitness Association (MFA), a non-profit member association whose mission is to “foster opportunities for the development and operational success of medically integrated fitness centers”, boasts over 4 million members. Another member organization, the Medical Wellness Association, promotes and integrates professional development of medical wellness programs, professionals, facilities and services.

The marriage between healthcare and fitness was recently announced in a new global health initiative called Exercise is Medicine. With healthcare costs skyrocketing and more than 80 million Americans leading sedentary lives, their mission is to bring together healthcare systems, providers, fitness professionals and community resources across the nation to better integrate physical activity into the nation’s healthcare. Managed by the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), along with ACE and the MFA, the partnership represents nearly 50 percent of certified fitness professionals worldwide.

A press release in February 2016 quotes Felipe Lobelo, MD, Ph.D., Director of Exercise is Medicine Global Research and Collaboration Center as saying, "Too few health systems and health care providers routinely include physical activity as part of their patient's treatment plans. Our goal is to elevate the status of physical activity so that it becomes a standard for health care. If we truly believe that exercise is indeed medicine, then physical activity-related care needs to be standardized, from patient activity assessments, to counseling and referrals, to certified community resources, just as other medical therapies and interventions are standardized."

Cedric Bryant, Ph.D., ACE Chief Science Officer added, “This initiative mobilizes all our nation’s resources to embrace the health promises of physical activity. The strategy of simply recommending people exercise hasn’t been enough. We are helping to facilitate the integration of fitness directly into our nation’s infrastructure, our healthcare system, and our communities.”

In Philadelphia, the Rittenhouse Women’s Wellness Center (RWWC), located at 1632 Pine Street, has been embracing this philosophy since 2008. The women-only medical center provides primary care physicians and goes deeper with the added specialties of gynecology, rheumatology, and medical and aesthetic skin care. Their wellness offerings extend to nutritional guidance with registered dietitians, as well as with psychologists for emotional well-being. Robert Saltzman, president of RWWC said that his business provides the care that women want, but oftentimes don’t get. With 10,000 active patients and 100 new patients every week, he believes his specialty medical and wellness service is just what the doctor ordered. A unique partnership program with Philadelphia businesses gives added value to their patients. For a small annual fee, RWWC patients can join their membership program which, in addition to their own enhanced healthcare services, offers discounts to those businesses. Partners include medical treatments that are generally not included in health insurance plans such as dental and optical services.

Local fitness companies are perfectly aligned as partners, too. City Fitness, a health club with four locations, takes it a step further by performing an overall fitness assessment and body composition analysis for RWWC members who then report the results to their

physician at RWWC. Tom Wingert, Marketing Director of City Fitness, calls this system of checks and balances, “prescribed fitness”.

One of the newest services offered at RWWC in their DermaCenter Medical Spa is called IV Nutrients, a method that offers an intravenous infusion of vitamins and minerals as part of the overall treatment for various conditions. The therapy, administered by board certified anesthesiologists and trained medical professionals, can be used to maintain optimal health and beauty to treat conditions such as exhaustion, dehydration, jet lag, hangovers, cold and flu. More serious medical conditions including asthma, migraines, chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, acute muscle spasm, and upper respiratory tract infections are also treated.

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