

## Sakakawea Medical Center staff lose weight and lower blood pressure since workplace health program began

**Company Name:** Sakakawea Medical Center

**Location:** Hazen, North Dakota

**Industry:** Medical Provider

**Founded:** 1948

**Number of Employees:** 135

**Age of Workplace Health Program:** 4 years

### Company Profile

Sakakawea Medical Center is a small hospital with 25 beds, which serves as a critical access hospital in rural North Dakota and provides acute care and some outpatient surgeries. The staff is comprised of social workers, nurses and doctors.

### Employee Health Program Origin

Sakakawea's workplace health program began with a two-year wellness grant from the North Dakota Department of Health, which paid for a week-long training of the hospital's wellness coordinator on how to develop a program and provide technical assistance to other employers in the region that wanted to establish wellness programs. Additional training opportunities were provided throughout the year as the medical center was developing its program. Sakakawea was committed to improving the health of its employees, so it adapted the wellness coordinator position role into a full time position and made it responsible for developing and sustaining the hospital's health and wellness program. In 2010, Sakakawea held its first wellness committee meeting and the group developed a vision statement and logo, set goals and developed actions steps for the goals they established for the program. Hospital management has been invested in the program, which has been an important element in its success.

### Sakakawea Medical Center Workplace Health Program Features

Some of the main features of the Sakakawea Medical Center program are:

- « A voluntary employee biometric health screening, and follow-up screening one year later
- « A wellness table where staff can obtain information on various aspects of wellness
- « A "Lunch and Learn" series for staff on various health topics they expressed interest in learning about
- « Employee challenges included achieving health weight and fruit and water consumption
- « A smoke-free campus



*Photo provided by Sakakawea Medical Center*  
Employees receive health screenings including blood tests.

- « Group fitness challenging staff to walk the distance it would take to get to Yellowstone National Park
- « Hospital-provided timers to remind staff a few times a day to get up and stretch, or walk around
- « Encouragement of staff to go out during the work day and take a walk on a trail near the hospital
- « Healthier options in vending machines
- « Daily salad bar in the employee cafeteria

## Program Costs

Employer pays for wellness coordinator's salary, prizes for competitions and other program activities.

## Program Outcomes

Staff report weight loss and lowered blood pressure levels.

## Challenges

Some of the challenges that Sakakawea face are low levels of participation in the online health risk assessment, some resistance from employees initially to learning about healthier living and receiving wellness-related information and employee engagement. The hospital also had some difficulties in getting the dietary department to provide healthier food options, and reported they could use more training in program monitoring and evaluation. Finally, employee turnover in the past couple of years has made it difficult to measure overall effectiveness of the hospital's health and wellness program.

*"People in general are so used to not feeling well that they feel it is the norm and don't know what feeling good is like anymore," says Sakakawea's worksite wellness coordinator, Bert Speidel. "Once they are educated as to what wellness is and how they have control over their own health, they start to take some ownership."*

# Sakakawea Medical Center

## Facilitators of Program Success

Continued engagement with staff and inclusion of employees in the decision-making process helped overcome some initial resistance, and the dietary department was eventually won over by bringing a dietary staff member on board the wellness committee.

CDC supports a coordinated, systematic and comprehensive approach to workplace health promotion. This profile is intended as an example of one employer's approach and is not intended as an endorsement. For more information on developing workplace health programs, please visit <http://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion>.



*\*Based on interview with Sakakawea Medical Center in October 2012 as part of the development of the CDC Work@Health® employer training program. This employer is not a participant in the Work@Health® program.*