A New Hub of Wellness Through Preventive Health

KCH shifts focus to proactive health management, to prevent illness and serious conditions before they occur

Shannan Flach, the CEO of Kingman Community Hospital, looks at a recent list of health rankings for all 102 counties in the state of Kansas.

She sees worrisome statistics for Kingman County in numerous categories, including adult obesity, premature death, physical inactivity, and access to exercise opportunities. For health outcomes, Kingman County is fifth from the bottom. In length of life, it's dead last.

How could these numbers be different if the community placed a higher priority on healthier lifestyles and staying well *before* people got sick? Shannan wants to find out. She's ready to make household words out of "preventive health" in Kingman County.

To do that, she and her KCH team have kicked off a new Wellness Program that she hopes will begin to change hearts and minds about the importance of a healthy community.

"We are more than just the biggest employer in this area. I want to see Kingman Community Hospital establish itself as the hub of wellness here and show people the role we can play in making all our lives better," Shannan says.

"The healthier a community is, the more productive and economically viable it is. Good health starts a positive cycle that offers numerous additional benefits to everyone."

Identifying biggest health issues

The first step for the KCH Wellness Program was creating a community wellness committee to decide which county health issues needed the most immediate attention.

Based on rankings and statistics from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the country's largest philanthropy focusing on health, the committee chose three prominent issues: adult obesity, physical inactivity, and lack of access to mental health providers. Next, the hospital sent out a survey asking for input on the best ways to encourage a focus on health and wellness, to ensure that the community will embrace and take part in the changes put in place.

With that information gathered, Shannan and her team are now working on the details of their new preventive health measures. They're starting small, but as their efforts expand, Shannan says KCH will start to include other county health issues as well.

The hospital also wants to proactively address preventive health by implementing a community outreach plan and by closely monitoring their patients' health from the beginning. That includes calling

patients to make appointments or provide reminders, and emphasizing the importance of annual physicals, mammograms and vaccinations in staying well.

"If we get in front of the problem, that sets the tone and makes it easier to implement those positive changes as we go," Shannan says. "We want to get people thinking now about getting out and participating in healthy activities, such as the team-based approach of Walk Kansas (walkkansas.org)."

Opening Community Garden

Another way Kingman Community Hospital intends to encourage health: by opening its new Community Garden, located north of the Medical Arts Clinic Building, which will allow community members to grow food or take it for their use. Besides being a beautiful addition, the garden can offer benefits that help address several key health issues in Kingman County: less physical activity, obesity, issues with food security, and less access to healthier food options.

Shannan hopes it all adds up to a deeper understanding of the power of preventive health.

"I want our community to see that focusing on healthy behaviors will help drive our health outcomes and extend our quality of life and length of life," Shannan says. "To do that, I'm hoping the community will start to take action by participating in changes that we are trying to initiate.

"Earning the state's lowest ranking in length of life should be a wake-up call for Kingman County. We are missing out on eight years of our lives that other people are enjoying. We have the ability to take charge and do something about it – together."