

CCRCs Embrace Wellness

Designing continuing care retirement communities (CCRCs) for wellness—not illness—is now the focus in senior living, according to some experts in the field of senior living design, and the results of a recent study of wellness programs among CCRCs appears to support this assertion.

“The National Whole-Person Wellness Survey,” conducted last year by Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging, a Chicago-based senior living organization, examined the programming, physical design, and operational elements of CCRCs in order to identify how some have achieved a culture of wellness.

The results signal a trend in wellness programs, with nearly one-third of the respondents reporting that they have hired staff in the past five years for the purpose of implementing such programs.

Physical design is an important factor in the success of wellness programs, the report says. “Spaces should be designed to meet residents’ needs and encourage participation in the programming developed for those spaces.”

According to the survey, four design trends influence whole-person wellness:

- **Size of space**—successful spaces were sized appropriately for the wellness function they served;

- **Natural light**—most successful spaces had at least some windows, with physical and social dimensions having many windows and spiritual spaces having the least;

- **Usage**—most successful spaces tended to be used five to seven days per week, except spaces for worship; and

- **Location**—most wellness spaces are distributed throughout the cam-

pus, but in relatively close proximity to other wellness spaces.

Measuring Wellness Programs

Three stages of wellness were identified and labeled in order to measure the different points on a CCRC’s journey to a comprehensive culture of whole-person wellness: Trailblazers, Travelers, and Tenderfeet. While the survey found that almost any community has the potential to be a Trailblazer, about half of today’s CCRCs are Tenderfeet, the report says.

“Trailblazers” have a well-developed culture of wellness exhibiting a spectrum of organizational attributes.

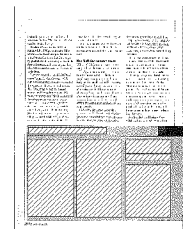
About one-fifth of the respondents were in this category, and 100 percent included staff wellness as part of their mission statements and enabled staff to use resident wellness programs.

In addition, Trailblazers reported that their wellness programs had a major impact on the reduction of residents’ use of medication and on the health care center. This group also found that the wellness programs had a positive impact on the organizations’ visibility and image in the community and in the ability to obtain greater market share.

About one-third of the survey’s respondents fell in the category of “Travelers”—CCRCs that have achieved varying levels of a culture of wellness, with 70 percent having several basic wellness components. The majority of Travelers have hired staff

in the past five years specifically to implement wellness programming and have more than two departments included on wellness teams.

The “Tenderfeet” category includes CCRCs that have almost no culture of wellness, with 97 percent having two or fewer of the eight components. Slightly less than half of the respon-



dents were Tenderfeet.

Managing Costs

Operationally, managing the costs of a wellness program was cited by more than half the respondents as one of the top five most important factors in successful programming. Most respondents reported that wellness program costs had increased in the past five years, which were largely attributed to expanded activities and services.

While most CCRCs are currently not charging fees to non-residents for use of their wellness programming, many are considering it for the future as an opportunity to generate revenue, the survey found.

To cover the costs of wellness programs, the majority of CCRCs will consider raising resident monthly fees to cover programming, while others will consider alternatives such as fund raising, fitness center membership fees, or individual program usage fees.

Survey respondents reported that the factors most essential to creating a successful wellness program are organizational commitment, program/activity variety, trained/experienced staff, programs appropriate to residents' abilities, and financial resources.

—Meg LaPorte