

Walking for Health Program

Type of Award: Outreach Project Award

Name of Institution: Willamette Falls Hospital

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NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

A six-month walking program for the community brought people into the hospital library and promoted the idea of a healthier community. By sponsoring the walking program and providing free pedometers, the library introduced a substantial number of people to its collection of quality books, videos, web resources, and to its knowledgeable staff.

The geographic area served by the project covered the greater Clackamas County area, which has an urban-rural population of 340,000 on the edge of metropolitan Portland.

We had initially asked the American Heart Association, American Association of Retired Persons, and Clackamas County Public Health to participate in the program. Establishing partnerships was the most difficult part of this project. Clackamas County Public Health never returned calls from the very beginning, American Heart Association's agenda was completely different from our program as intended, and AARP (which had promised to send us more pedometers and to promote our program) sent back a copy of our proposal after we had received funding, and we never heard from that organization again. If I were to plan this project again, I would try to partner with the local retirement communities and senior centers; retirees are often very interested in the state of their health and in wellness issues. Nationwide non-profits, at least in my experience, have missions which are far beyond a local scope, and to try to collaborate on a local project with them on a small scale didn't work.

We also tried to partner with physicians who practice in Clackamas County, sending them "prescription pads" for pedometers and explaining the project in an accompanying letter. While some physicians sent patients to the health library for pedometers, we didn't receive the response we hoped for, and had to also send out letters to senior living facilities and to newsletters to draw more interest.

Sixty-nine physicians (internists and family medicine physicians) "prescribed" 195 pedometers. When the walking program first began in Spring, 2005, 399 registered walkers were participating; average age was 58; there were 124 men and 275 women reporting. Those 60-69 years old were the largest group of participants, as we had hoped. The next largest group was the 70-79 year olds; the third largest was the 50-59 year olds. At the end of 6 months, 50 walkers had completed the program.

We sponsored an open house for those who wanted to pick up a pedometer and learn to program it. We found, however, that training people to use their pedometers on an as needed basis worked better, since only 10 people attended the open house.

No exhibits were needed for this project. We designed registration forms, hints for walkers, and gave away Medlineplus bookmarks, pens. Included are the forms/flyers we developed, along with the announcements we sent out.

We did not design a website for this project, and no document delivery or reference services were provided. The project director and volunteers decided on a 6-month time frame for a walking program. We met with our marketing department to develop some of the “prescription” pads and other forms we needed. We promoted the program primarily to the physicians at the beginning of the program, and then expanded our field to the greater community by writing articles for our hospital newsletter and the local newspapers. The 6 volunteers working in the Health Library were responsible for giving away the pedometers and explaining the walking program. One of the volunteers recorded monthly steps on an Access spreadsheet he developed. The librarian taught a class toward the end of the program on how to use the web to find medical information, during which heavy emphasis was put upon the value of Medlineplus along with other quality websites.

We evaluated the project by using the statistics the Access program gave us each month. By the end of November, the fifty participants still reporting steps each month who had remained with the program walked over 53 million steps and almost 27,000 miles. Our goal was to have people in the county incorporate walking into their everyday lives. Based on the fact that they walked regularly for 6 months and, when the program ended, were still walking, the fifty people who completed the program had shown that walking each day was indeed part of their lifestyle.

We didn’t have any significant problems throughout the project. However, none of the county or city newspapers in Clackamas County ran our press release mentioning the walking program. Some of the walkers’ pedometers didn’t work, or they dropped them, or lost them, or drowned them.

So, what’s next? We have about 100 pedometers left, and will send out a flyer again to physicians’ offices letting them know they can still send patients in to receive a free one. The hospital is considering offering another walking program, perhaps in early 2007. Since the Access database has already been set up, and the volunteers know how the program works, it will actually be very easy for the library to sponsor another walking program. The librarian is also going to expand the number of sessions of the class she taught, “Finding Health Information on the Web.” The two-hour hands-on class last November, limited to 3 per session, had 2 sessions which filled, and had to add a third session. Fall seems to be the best time to offer the class, when interest seems to be the highest. The hospital will provide funding for the walking program the next time we offer it.

We had hoped that by giving away free pedometers we could attract more people to the community health library. However, our statistics have not reflected increased use since the program ended. The project certainly delighted those who participated, and several people asked us to continue it. They were pleased that the hospital was interested in the health of its community. As pleased as they were, however, having a program such as this is only one key to having the library used by the community it serves. More importantly, the location of the library became a major issue during the walking program. There were a number of people who came to the hospital library looking for their

pedometers, when they actually should have gone to the community health library (a five-minute ride from the hospital). The result of this was that the librarian was able to convince the hospital administration of the importance of combining both libraries. As of May, the libraries are now together on the hospital campus.

I don't believe the program needs to be improved. I was satisfied with training materials, promotional materials, etc. Next time, however, I would purchase cheaper pedometers that record steps only, or even suggest vendors in the area to walkers who could buy their own. I would also emphasize the 10,000 steps/day concept more, since the assumption is that is the optimum number of steps everyone should take each day.

Fifty of our walkers completed the six-month program. I was a bit disappointed that more didn't stick with the program, but I believe that after six months, for those fifty people, we did reach our goal of having people "incorporate walking into their daily routines."

Keeping the plan simple is crucial to achieving success in any project. It's important not to try and change the world more than a small increment in any project you undertake. The librarian used committed people on her staff to make the program work; one of the particularly dedicated volunteers was responsible for designing the Access database, which we could not have done without. Marketing was crucial to this project; the problem with marketing was that it could have consumed more than its fair share of time, so that the actual activities of the project were neglected. The librarian used the knowledge and resources of the marketing department of the hospital, which was able to help a great deal with that aspect of the project.

If I were to begin this project again, I would probably handle it the same way. Not only did it progress smoothly, but it was *fun* for everybody, including the librarian, the volunteers, and the walkers! I now wish, however, that we had partnered with the local retirement centers; I think we would have had an easier time promoting the project, and finding committed participants.

Advice for those who are considering a similar project would be to advertise early and throughout the program. Have the right organizations participating that will be willing to take an active part in the program, and not sit on the sidelines. I would also say that a hospital with no funding could actually do this for very little; everyone participating in the program would have to purchase their own pedometers, which are relatively inexpensive. The only budget required would be for the "incentive" prizes each month, along with some promotional costs and staff time required to set up and maintain the database.