

TOP STORY

Second Opinion

Neustatter: Learn to COPE at work and with your community

PATRICK NEUSTATTER Jan 28, 2023 0

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Should you happen to slash your artery with a box cutter opening supplies at the office; should you step out of a closet unexpectedly and cause your boss to have a heart attack; if your diabetic coworker suddenly gets sweaty and passes out; should your elderly office manager suddenly be unable to talk or move one arm ... would you know what to do about it?

COPE – the local Community Outreach Patient Engagement program is worried that you wouldn't, so they have come up with a Community Health and Wellness @ Work Initiative that will incorporate the FEMA sponsored “you are the help till help arrives” program. So you can be the first responder and know what to do in these emergencies.

COPE Promoting a Healthy Community

This new initiative is the reason for writing about COPE now, but it is worth noting how COPE – which is the outreach component of the Rappahannock Emergency Medical Services (REMS) Council, headed up by Executive Director Wayne Perry – has its fingers in a lot of pies and is bent on enhancing community wellness overall.

I wrote about their Stroke Smart program before. But, they have a monthly community meeting where they address situations that have been identified as community needs – nutrition, housing, human trafficking, dental and eye health and one particular need, blood

donations – with the slightly quirky twist of soliciting for doggy blood donations (yes, dogs need transfusions, as well, sometimes).

The COPE website (copewellnessva.org) elaborates on all the good services they provide, as well as sharing links to many agencies in the Fredericksburg area: Mental Health America, Empowerhouse (for victims of domestic violence), rental and utility assistance, Rappahannock United Way, Virginia Rent Relief Program and Micah Ministeries. They also have help for people needing to get blood pressure and blood sugar testing (partnering with Germanna Community College) and much more.

I also see them at The Table (the program run by St George's Episcopal Church distributing free produce to the needy) promoting different health issues, as well as providing demonstrations of how to cook healthy meals with that produce.

Bringing it to The Workplace

I got the low down on this latest program from Nana Noi, Community Outreach Coordinator for COPE. We are “a convener, champion and collaborator” of community health needs she explained. This latest push, the Community Health and Wellness @ Work Initiative, is the result of a realization that “we should be trying to bring first aid and health care information to companies and their employees” Nana Noi told me.

Specifically, they are following the “You Are the Help Until Help Arrives” program instigated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA, and will train participating employees in acting as first responders in emergencies — teaching “stop the bleed”, CPR, use of an AED (automatic external defibrillators that can be seen in public and

private locations now), stay safe, position the injured and provide comfort – as shown on the FEMA website.

“We are encouraging basics also,” Nana told me — like having a first aid kit. “I went around the mall visiting shops, and found none had first aid kits.” But their program is about more than just what to do for these urgencies. They want to “promote healthy, happy, productive and creative workplaces.”

Rather than relying on health and wellness initiatives coming from a company’s headquarters, they wanted to make it happen locally. They have approached various local businesses, already, and will be looking to identify committed members who will be designated as “champions” and “ambassadors” – company members who will promote a policy of health and wellbeing and will introduce education on topics like sleep, activity, nutrition, stress, back care and travel health.

Also, they want to get employees involved in community programs, like serving meals at the Brisben Center, organize parenting and health literacy classes, ride shares to local farmers markets and adopt a grandparent program, to name a few.

A Growing Trend

The merit of the kind of program COPE is introducing are corroborated by other organizations pushing the same kind of thing. The “Effective Employee Wellness Solutions” site WellStep lists the “seven workplace wellness trends” that are becoming “must-haves” for employees.

They list meditation, virtual meetings, work flexibility, telemedicine, financial health, stress management and mental health, as things that employees look for.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics, in a book on wellness programs, say workplaces should focus on worker well-being, creating a supportive workplace environment, offering prevention-focused health education and providing rewards for a healthy employee.

Such programs may help with recruitment, The American Psychological Association reports, “81% of workers are looking for jobs that will give them mental health benefits.”

Employers may see this as burdensome, but the organization Indeed, that touts itself as “the #1 Jobsite worldwide” notes that increased employee health and wellbeing leads to improved morale, attendance, helps productivity and retention. And there is significant financial gain to the company by eliminating impaired productivity from personal and family problems.

So, look for Nana Noi coming by, trying to recruit your company and get you to be an ambassador or champion – and know how much you can help your fellow employees and the community, in general.

Dr. Patrick Neustatter of Caroline County is the author of “Managing Your Doctor: The Smart Patient’s Guide to Getting Effective Affordable Healthcare.”