

Incentives for Better Health

January 26, 2009 12:15 PM Fran Simon

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While Tulane employs the largest number of people in New Orleans, the university has launched an initiative to make its workforce one of the healthiest.



Erica Taylor discusses a new walking program with participants that encourages employees to walk 10,000 steps each day. (Photos by Paula Burch-Celentano)

"We are investing in wellness programs for a number of reasons," explains Anne Baños, vice president and chief of staff. "We care about our employees and want to encourage a high quality of life. Taking care of yourself, eating right and exercising routinely ? all contribute to overall physical and mental good health."

In a time of rising health costs, it also makes sense to encourage employees to take care of themselves proactively through wellness activities.

Health screenings and exercise programs can contribute to better healthcare rates for the university and healthier individuals. "Some health problems may be avoided entirely and others may be mitigated in severity," she adds.

At ongoing "Know Your Numbers" events, announced by e-mail to eligible employees who are in the United Healthcare insurance plan, participants receive a confidential biometric health screening that includes measuring blood pressure, glucose, cholesterol and body mass index. Each person receives results in five minutes at no cost.

On the UnitedHealthcare website, employees can upload health data to their "Personal Health Record" and complete a confidential online "Health Assessment" to receive an immediate personal report of health status and ideas for improvement. Employees also may enroll in online or telephone-based health coaching programs that focus on losing weight, quitting smoking, exercising more, relieving stress and other lifestyle changes for improved health.

Each enrolled employee and covered spouse can receive up to \$175 in gift cards through UnitedHealthcare by participating in the health assessment and online and telephone-based health coaching programs.



Sandy West, left, director of strategy, planning and implementation in the Workforce Management Organization, chairs the TUWellness Committee that is organizing several on-the-job programs to improve the health of Tulane employees.

Spearheading several on-the-job programs is the TUWellness Committee comprised of 14 employees along with 20 additional employees who have volunteered to be wellness champions. The committee is rolling out a new "Lose and Win" program in partnership with UnitedHealthcare on all campuses that is designed to promote team spirit, encourage healthy eating and motivate employees to lose unwanted pounds.

"It was designed to help employees understand the many benefits that you will *win* when you *lose* unwanted pounds, including reducing your risk for disease and disability, increased self-esteem and living a longer, healthier life," says Sandy West, director of strategy, planning and implementation in the Workforce Management Organization and chair of the TUWellness Committee.

The university also is partnering with Plus One Health Management to offer the [10K-A-Day](#) walking program led by Erica Taylor, who holds a master's degree in health and exercise sciences and was hired to lead the new program.

The goal is to inspire each employee to walk 10,000 steps every day. Employees who participate and keep an online log of the steps recorded online may be eligible to receive gift cards. Taylor, along with other Tulane employees, will lead walking groups before and after work and at lunchtime on all campuses, but participation does not require walking with a group on the job; employees may walk at any time.

"I have a passion for health, wellness and fitness," says Taylor. "Walking is a fun and easy way to get healthier. Exercise is the best medicine."

The walking program is free of charge to eligible Tulane employees and all materials will be provided, including pedometers, which are distributed at each scheduled information session.

For more information about participating in the walking program, e-mail [Erica Taylor](#) or call 504-247-1720. For questions about participating in the other wellness programs, e-mail [Sandy West](#).