

Comparative Effectiveness Research:
Campus Wellness Programs

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Introduction

Comparative effectiveness research traditionally refers to the direct comparison of existing health care interventions or pharmaceutical treatments to determine their effectiveness and provide information on their benefits and harms (What Is Comparative Effectiveness Research, n.d.). Wellness is a multidimensional state of being describing the existence of positive health in an individual as exemplified by quality of life and a sense of well-being (Wellness Center, 2015). Many colleges and universities, large and small, across the United States have an established wellness program available to their students. These programs are concerned with primary prevention and health education to target aspects of student life such as academic impacts, stress management, mental health, sexual health, and alcohol and substance abuse.

The University of Wyoming (UW) recently opened the Wellness Center in November 2015 as the final piece of the Half Acre Recreation and Wellness Center renovation. The UW Wellness Center aims to support a culture of wellness for the university community. With its ten areas of focus, the Wellness Center programs provide information, educational programming, and services to promote health and wellness of students, staff, faculty, and even community members. The ten areas of focus include; academic impacts, alcohol and other drug abuse, general health, mental health, nutrition, physical activity and fitness, safety, sexual health, tobacco use, and occupational and financial wellness. Massage therapy, personal training, and athletic training are also offered through the UW Wellness Center. Wellness Ambassadors, the peer education program, is also offered for students to join and utilize as a resource. After its first year, program evaluations will be necessary for future growth and success. Program evaluation can come in many forms. This research focused on a twist on comparative effectiveness research.

Instead of comparing healthcare interventions or pharmaceutical treatments, the current research compared various campus wellness programs to each other and ultimately, the University of Wyoming's Wellness Center. The purpose of this research was to work on program evaluation, learn new ideas, and make recommendations for the future success of the UW Wellness Center, its programs, and future interns.

Methods

For this research, five campus wellness programs were selected. The criteria used to get the most diverse sample included varied geographic region, student population, and the status of their wellness program, either new or well established (Table 1). These schools' campus wellness programs were selected to all be very diverse to get the best, varied information to compare. The five schools chosen were Simmons College, Grand Rapids Community College, Colorado State University, Appalachian State University, and Arizona State University (Appendix 1). The next step was reaching out to the directors through email asking a variety of questions about topics with information that was not readily available on the school wellness websites (Appendix 2).

After about two weeks, responses from directors were compiled as well as information gathered from various school wellness center websites. This information was compared to the University of Wyoming's Wellness Center. The current researcher then arrived at some conclusions and recommendations for the future of the UW Wellness Center and for the future Wellness Center interns to work with and work toward.

School	Location	Student Population	Status of Wellness Program
Simmons College	Boston, MA	~5,000	Well established
Grand Rapids Community College	Grand Rapids, MI	~15,000	Newer
Colorado State University	Fort Collins, CO	~30,000	Well established
Appalachian State University	Boone, NC	~18,000	Newer
Arizona State University	Tempe, AZ	~80,000	Well established

Table 1. The schools compared to the University of Wyoming Wellness Center and their location, student population, and status of wellness program.

Results

Valuable information was gathered from each school’s wellness program website and from wellness directors’ email responses. Wellness directors from Arizona State University and Colorado State University returned responses to all questions in full. Information from all wellness programs was compiled and reduced into common features, marketing strategies, program evaluation techniques, peer education program information, and online education initiatives.

Common features that each of the five campus wellness programs, plus the UW Wellness Center, included on their websites were definitions of health and wellness, a list of dimensions of wellness and/or areas of focus, and a menu of both on-campus and outside resources. Five of the six total wellness programs compared had a wellness peer education program of varying involvement. Most campus wellness programs offered presentation outreach menus and programs related to mindfulness and bike safety.

Marketing strategies were varied at each campus. Arizona State University (ASU) has been quite successful and has seen big numbers attending programs/events and using their services. They have moved their marketing completely digital. Utilizing a graphic design team, ASU now markets with less print and more digital materials in the form of social media, online education, e-newsletters, and some events/outreach (K. Moses, 2016). Colorado State University (CSU) takes a different approach by utilizing all university communication channels including print, digital, social media, online resources, Ram Orientation, and Ram Welcome (C. Berg, 2016).

Program evaluation techniques were also varied. ASU utilizes focus groups, surveys, “give us a grade” evaluations and participant interviews to get the most information and feedback (K. Moses, 2016). CSU does utilize needs assessments and program evaluations on a regular basis. They also measure success by setting outcome measurements and using initiative evaluations (C. Berg, 2016).

Peer education programs were the most diverse. Five out of the six total colleges offered this type of program. At ASU, the program is called Well Devil Ambassadors. It is a group made up of selected students that will live within the residential colleges and work to support and promote the health and wellness of the resident students. It is a selective, compensated position (Educational Outreach and Student Services, n.d.). At CSU the program is titled C.R.E.W.S. which stands for Creating Respect, Educating Wellness (by and for) Students. This is a highly selective position that requires a two year commitment to promoting health and wellness and providing presentation outreach. Students involved in this program receive extensive training and college credit for their participation and service (Health Education & Prevention Services, 2013). At Simmons College the group is titled Wellness Ambassadors. This group also strives to

promote health and wellness to their peers. The group at Simmons puts on special events, “Tuesday Taboo Topics” presentations and casual Wellness Wednesday informational events. The Wellness Ambassadors at Simmons College also support their peers with the “Ask a Wellness Ambassador” program which is where students can email a question and receive a direct answer from a Wellness Ambassador or be directed to a supporting resource (Health, Wellness and Recreation, 2016). Appalachian State University also offers a program titled Wellness Peer Educators. It is a student group that meet weekly and are the main providers of the presentation outreach services that other groups on campus can request (Student Wellness Center, 2015). Finally, the UW Wellness Center has a group called the Wellness Ambassadors. This group has been established as a registered student organization and is small, but growing. They aim to spread their knowledge of resources to their peers and have fun while doing so. They are also trained in wellness topics to help them become more of a resource to peers (Wellness Center, 2015).

While Simmons College and Appalachian State University utilize in-person presentations for their outreach menu, Arizona State University and Colorado State University are taking a different approach and moving toward online education. This has expanded student access to their services and improved their reach. Arizona State University provides online health and wellness education modules for their freshman academic success classes (K. Moses, 2016). Colorado State University also has moved to providing more online modules instead of in-person presentations. They also offer an online resource titled YOU@CSU which is an online portal that is personal for each student to learn about what they want on their own time and at their own speed. It promotes resources, skill building, goal setting, and self-awareness (C. Berg, 2016). The

University of Wyoming Wellness Center is also working toward building a presentation outreach menu for in-person use by students and faculty groups (Wellness Center, 2015).

Limitations

Some limitations of this study were the small sample size, limited questions asked to wellness directors, and the fact that wellness trends and the health/wellness needs of student populations will vary throughout the years. The sample of five colleges in this research was made as diverse as possible, but even more information could be gathered by researching more schools. A limited amount of questions were posed to directors for time purposes. For further research, different questions could be posed to learn about different aspects. It is also important to note that what is successful now may not be successful later and that different student population will respond differently to different programs/topics/services. This just highlights the importance of continued program evaluation.

Discussion

This research is important because learning about outside campus wellness programs is a crucial part of program evaluation for the UW Wellness Center. Continuing program evaluation and research externally as well as internally will give the best feedback after the first year of being open and running. Learning about new ideas and programs that other schools are offering can help the UW Wellness Center grow and succeed in the future. Each school personalizes their wellness offerings to their student population and learning new ideas and making them work within your own campus wellness program will better the program. It is also important to reflect internally and evaluate from within.

This research would benefit from being continued. The current researcher plans to pass on this research and results to future UW Wellness Center interns to continue education and continue external program evaluation. After this research, it was deducted that the University of Wyoming's Wellness Center stands up fairly well in comparison to these five other programs. There are many similarities and shared missions among the programs. I feel that this indicates a success for the UW Wellness Center in its first year and this continued research will bring future growth and success as well.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the University of Wyoming Wellness Center after careful consideration of all gathered information will focus on program evaluation, the peer education program, expanded marketing, and expanded access and reach.

Program evaluation is very important to the success of these wellness programs. After the UW Wellness Center's first year, evaluation from within and from students will be beneficial to future success. Programs from Colorado State University and Arizona State University utilize various program evaluation techniques as well as needs assessments to secure success on a regular basis. I believe that it would be completely within the UW Wellness Center's capacity to implement program evaluations to students and other individuals that attend their programs and use their services. Focus groups, surveys, and even participant interviews could give more intimate insight into how students and other participants respond to offered programs and services. This could give great insight to future programs and assesses what the UW community truly needs.

The Wellness Center peer education program, Wellness Ambassadors, had a very successful first year and a lot is to be learned from their personal successes as well as from other campus wellness peer education programs. Further structure needs to be provided to the group at UW for future success. As noticed with other peer education programs, having specific duties, goals, and responsibilities helped get programs/presentations/outreach done successfully. Giving more prestige to the group by implementing a point system for membership would also be beneficial to ensure that those involved are dedicated.

Expanding marketing of programs and services at the UW Wellness Center will greatly improve knowledge shared and attendance at programs. Colorado State University Health Education and Prevention Services utilizes all channels of campus communication to promote their offerings. Arizona State University utilizes a different approach as they have moved almost completely to online and digital promotion. For the UW Wellness Center I believe it is realistic to combine the two marketing strategies. Especially being so new, I think that utilizing all campus communication channels with a focus on online and digital options is the best strategy. Print posters, newspaper advertisements, digital signage, student email, information tables, presentations at orientation, and in class announcements for specific classes will help information reach as many as possible.

Expanding access and the reach of programs is something that is important, but will take longer to formulate and implement. Arizona State University has not only moved their marketing strategies online, but their educational outreach presentations as well. They now offer all of their topics in online modules for students to access and learn on their own time and in their own way. I feel that it is great to have both in person and online options to further your reach to all types of students. Offering online modules for topics such as alcohol and substance abuse and sexual

health, topics that have low in-person turnouts, could be a start in furthering the reach of the UW Wellness Center. This way information is available in multiple facets.

Appendix 1: Brief Summaries of Each Selected School and Wellness Program

Simmons College is a private, women focused undergraduate college and a private coeducational graduate college. It is located in Boston, Massachusetts with a total student population of about 5,000. Their well-established Health, Wellness, and Recreation programs are a part of the Student Life division at the college. They offer fitness programs along with a variety of wellness resources (on and off campus). A peer education program titled, Wellness Ambassadors, is available for the students to be a part of and to utilize as resources. They focus to promote academic success through preventative and educational outreach initiatives (Health, Wellness and Recreation, 2016).

Grand Rapids Community College is located in Grand Rapids, Michigan and offers associate degree programs along with a variety of certificate programs. With a student population of about 15,000, the campus is large with a smaller community atmosphere. The wellness program focuses are stress management and physical health. Many fitness classes are offered along with some mindfulness programming. Their website offers definitions of their seven dimensions of wellness; physical, emotional, intellectual, social, spiritual, environmental, and occupational. Resources that are available to students are also listed (Grand Rapids Community College, 2011).

Colorado State University is located in Fort Collins, Colorado and has a student population of about 30,000. It is a public university. Their very well established wellness program is part of their Health Education and Prevention Services. The aim is to support the health and well-being of students by identifying health/wellness priorities and delivering appropriate and relevant programs and services. The focus areas they have identified include: alcohol and other drugs prevention, mental health, initiatives, nutrition and physical activity

initiatives, CREWS Peer Education, sexual health initiatives, and tobacco cessation. Education and prevention presentations are available to be requested by student groups and faculty. Resources are listed for each area of focus on and off campus by their website (Health Education & Prevention Services, 2013).

Appalachian State University is located in Boone, North Carolina. Their student population is about 18,000. It is a public university offering a fairly new Wellness and Prevention Center. They offer resources and services pertaining to their six dimensions of wellness; intellectual, social, emotional, occupational, spiritual, and physical. Educational programs and presentations, appointments for services, and a list of on-campus and outside resources are available through the Wellness and Prevention Center concerning their seven areas of focus. The seven areas of focus include; substance use/abuse and other addictive behavior counseling and education, nutrition, physical fitness, sleep resources, stress management, sexual health, and mindfulness practices (Student Wellness Center, 2015).

Arizona State University is located in Tempe, Arizona and is a very large public university with a student population of about 80,000. Their wellness program is very well established and is over thirty years old. They aim to promote wellness and foster a healthy campus community by offering information, education, and resources related to their areas of focus. Areas of focus at Arizona State University include; alcohol and other drugs, depression and suicide, healthy relationships and sexual violence, and stress. They offer presentations, online education, special events, social marketing, information tables, and various walk-in services related to their areas of focus. A peer education program called, Well Devil Ambassadors, is offered for student, by students to promote wellness in their areas of focus also (Educational Outreach and Student Services, n.d.).

Appendix 2: Email Template Sent to Wellness Directors

Dear (Wellness Director):

My name is Ashley Clark; I am a senior studying Kinesiology and Health Promotion with a minor in the Honors Program at the University of Wyoming in Laramie, WY. I am also currently an intern for our brand new Wellness Center at the university.

I am doing a project to finish out my honors program requirements involving researching various campus wellness programs in order to learn more about them, and using that information to evaluate our Wellness Center programs and services.

I have been researching the wellness services at your institution and have been very interested in learning a few more things that I am hoping you could help me with. Your website has great information offered, but I just would like more detailed information. I have compiled a list of a few short questions about your program as a whole and your peer education program that I am asking you reply to this email with to aid me in my project. I have listed the questions below.

- How long has your institution had a wellness center/program/services available to students?
- Which of your wellness programs/services has been the most successful with your student population?
- How do you market your wellness offerings to your student population?
- Is your Wellness Ambassador position a selective position that students apply for?
- How long has your Wellness Ambassador program been established?
- How many students out of the total student population utilize your wellness services during the school year?
- How do you measure the success of your programs? Do you utilize needs assessments and program evaluations on a regular basis?

Thank you so much for your time; I know this time of year is busy for all involved in college campuses. I would appreciate your response to my few questions because your wellness program is of interest to my cause. Please do not hesitate to ask any questions of clarification and send your responses to aclark28@uwyo.edu.

Best regards,

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