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Andrews hospital staffers continue weight-loss regime

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Andrews hospital staffers continue weight-loss regime

Program prompts lifestyle changes, exercising, healthier food choices.

By Ruth Campbell

Staff Writer

ANDREWS -- Permian Regional Medical Center now is home to some of the biggest losers in town -- weight-wise that is.

Through the LoneStart Wellness Initiative's challenge, some 160 of the hospital's 300 employees shed a total of 500.5 pounds in three months, said Tasa Watts, director of marketing and public relations. Although the program officially ended about two months ago, several staffers are keeping up the momentum.

Home Respiratory Department Manager Linda Jones has taken off 37 pounds so far and respiratory therapist Chris Williams, 35 pounds. The program challenged employees to become more fit by making healthier food choices and becoming more active.

"At first I didn't think that just by changing what we ate we would be successful. I thought we would probably have to exercise, exercise, exercise," Jones said.

But after two weeks of cutting out fried foods, saturated fat and hydrogenated oil, 51-year-old Jones could see results. Not only has she lost weight, but she doesn't have to take blood pressure medication anymore.

Jones and her husband, who joined her on the program, ride bicycles at least five miles a day, and she and Williams walk.

"It's a lifestyle change and the thing that makes it really neat is that the people involved made it fun. We ribbed each other," Jones said.

Williams, 49, said it wasn't so much what you couldn't have, but "what you could have that was better for you."

"It actually boiled down to making the right food choices," Jones said. "Instead of having a candy bar, eat a piece of fruit. If you wanted a Coke, make it a Diet Coke. If you wanted something and were having a craving, have a minimal amount of it, then get back on the program."

Employees were divided into four-person teams and weighed in every three weeks -- in private. The team with the highest percentage of weight loss won and the top three squads and top individual were awarded prizes.

Williams said the process held employees accountable for what they put in their mouths and it was an exercise in team work.

"She'd have a bad day and I'd say, 'Don't eat that.' and I'd have a bad day and she'd say, 'You're not going to eat that, are you?'"

"You knew at end of three-week period that you were going to be weighed in and you really don't want to disappoint the rest of the people on your team," Williams said.

Williams also increased her activity going from walking -- possibly -- once a week to every day. Her husband also got in on the act and if she was dragging, her husband would encourage her to get going.

"My energy level is through the roof," she said, adding she would like to take off another 50 pounds.

Director of Social Services Flora Braly, 49, said she started the regime before the LoneStart program began and has lost a total of 27 pounds. Instead of just walking her dog, Braly, who is also on the Andrews City Council, logs two miles a day on the treadmill.

"It became fun," Braly said. "The thing was to get into the habit. That was the hard part for me."

As of June 13, Pharmacy Tech Patsy Turnbow has lost 54 pounds -- 41 since beginning LoneStart. She reads labels, counts calories, changed her food selections and exercises.

"I started going to the Wellness Center (at the hospital) and exercising in the pool, taking the stairs some and just making an effort to get up and do something," said Turnbow, who turned 50 on June 21. "My goal is one more pound about 80 times."

Braly said she would like to lose a "little bit" more weight, but she didn't think she could accomplish what she has already. Changes in the cafeteria also helped.

"That that was a big hit," Braly said. "People noticed that because they would (post) the calories. When you saw that taco salad you'd been eating for the last five years and it had 1,300 calories versus the grilled chicken with 375, all of the sudden it was like, 'I don't think I want that.'"

LoneStart program results

As a hospital, Permian Regional Medical Center started off at 20,445.95 pounds and finished at 19,945.9 pounds. This was a total loss of 500.05 pounds, which was 2.445 percent.

First place with a total percentage loss of 9.785 percent included Rosina Vallejo, Shari Smith, Beverly Huey and Rhonda Travis. Each person won \$125.

Second place with a total percentage loss of 6.459 percent included hospital Administrator Randy Richards, Julie Jarvis, Patsy Turnbow and Linda Epley. Each person got \$75.

Third place with a total percentage loss of 5.552 percent was Ken Cox, Pam Campbell, Carolyn Whiddon and Sherri Longshore. Each person got \$20.

Pam Campbell had the highest percentage individual loss with 11.643 percent going from 146 to 129 pounds. She won \$200.

Source: Tasa Watts, director of marketing and public relations.

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