

Katie Johnson: Good morning, and welcome to Apple a Day, Lake Region Healthcare's health and wellness segment where we feature news and information you can use to live a healthier lifestyle. This is Katie Johnson, and my guest today is Karen Nitzkorski. She is the worksite wellness and school coordinator with Partnership for Health, and she is my guest today to focus on one of the seven components of wellness that maybe is under ... What's the word I'm looking for? Misunderstood, or not paid attention to quite as much as the others, and that's occupational health. Good morning, Karen. Thanks for joining us.

Karen N.: Good morning. I'm happy to be here.

Katie Johnson: Tell me a little bit about your role at Partnership for Health, and your background, and why occupational health or worksite wellness is part of your career path.

Karen N.: I consider occupational health worksite wellness, and so I am the worksite wellness coordinator for Partnership for Health, and I recruit worksites to go on a journey with us to learn best practices around worksite wellness. I've worked with more than 50 businesses in the four counties that we serve, which are Otter Tail, Becker, Clay and Wilkin counties.

Katie Johnson: Our community health challenge is going on right now. We're really encouraging people to get out, be active, be moving, and physical health of course is one of those seven components that we're focusing on. We really want to bring in all seven and talk about them individually, because we know that it's important to realize they're interconnected and we need to have health in all seven areas.

As we talk about occupational health, you said worksite wellness, occupational health, kind of interchangeable to you. What really do we mean when we talk about occupational health?

Karen N.: I actually, in preparation for this, went and looked to see the seven dimensions of wellness. Occupational wellness is the ability to get personal fulfillment from our jobs or our chosen career fields while still maintaining balance in our lives. Our desire to contribute in our careers to make a positive impact on the organizations we work in, and to society as a whole, leads to occupational wellness.

It's not just showing up for work. That's probably the key to our life balance, especially when we spend so much time at work, to have occupational wellness. I consider it worksite wellness, which I look at it more from a system standpoint. We hope to make the healthy choice the easy choice. We want to look at putting policy systems and environmental changes in place so that the healthy choice is an easier choice for all employees.

Katie Johnson: Can you tell us what are some common obstacles to good occupational health?

Karen N.: I would say policy systems and environmental obstacles. If you have an

environment that has lots of candy dishes sitting out, or a break room with donuts in it, or not a system that allows you to take your breaks, or at least you feel like you can't take your breaks, so we need to make sure there's a system in place that really encourages people's breaks.

I was the chairman of the West Fargo School Board, and when Dr. Flowers came on board back in 2011, he says, "Nobody takes breaks here." I said, "Okay, guess what? We can change that. You be the leader, and your school board will be the leader, and we're going to really encourage people to take breaks and take care of themselves, instead of the intensity of work," which oftentimes is the case.

Then policies. If we have a policy in place that says we should take our breaks, let's take our breaks, and let's enforce that policy, or encourage it. Enforcement, that sounds like ... Oh my goodness. If we encourage and promote, and promote some of the things that we have in place that are good for employees, we can help them make some better choices.

Katie Johnson: How about as individuals, are there signs that we are in good or bad occupational health, or maybe red flags that we need a little tune-up?

Karen N.: That's a really good question, and I would say yes. If you see people eating at their desks; also if you see that people are stressed out. Oftentimes, workloads don't necessarily match our ability, and so we need to have our managers really in tune to what our workloads are. Sometimes we're in a situation where we're understaffed, and what can we do about that? Sometimes just communication alone can help. Say, "I know we're understaffed and I'm really sorry that we're understaffed, and I know you're working really hard. What can we do? Can we encourage more breaks? Help us think through what we can do with this," might be some simple things that could do. Communication is key. Policy systems and environmental changes are key.

Attitudes. What can we choose in this life? One thing we probably can choose is our attitude, so if there's some ways that we can help our attitudes. There's been a lot of research about if we can think about what we're grateful for every day, and if we do that right before we go to bed and we think of three things we're grateful for ... We don't have to journal about it, we can just think about it. We can be thankful for that, and that alone can help with our attitude.

Katie Johnson: That's interesting. My next question was going to be, how can this impact a person both on and off the job? I can see that being one example of just improving your mindset overall.

Karen N.: Exactly. A lot of these things are intentional things. It's hard, when we just get so busy, to be intentional. How do we become intentional? Oftentimes that's habits, and this three things you're grateful for, that would have to be a habit. Another thing is taking your breaks, that's a habit. Realizing that the world is not on your shoulders. We have to give ourselves a break, we have to learn to take care of

ourselves. We have to put in our days opportunities for physical activity and healthy eating, and we have to be intentional about those, too.

Now, I am not this huge, huge workout person, but I have made a pact with myself that I am going to have movement every single day. I'm not going to workout every day, but today I'm going to go walking. Where am I going to go walking? A Center for the Arts is open from 11:00-2:00 every day when they don't have a show during the week. I'm going to go down there and I'm going to walk probably 30 times around, and I'm going to feel good about myself in an environment that I think is comforting. I just tell myself, "Okay, what has been my physical activity break today?" If it's only 10 minutes, it's only 10 minutes, and don't beat yourself up.

Katie Johnson: That's great advice. What I'm hearing you say is there are things that we can do as employers to make the healthy choice the easy choice, to make our culture in our workplace one that contributes. There are also a lot of things we can do as individuals, and I think that's an important balance or distinction to make that we have joint responsibility as employers and employees towards occupational health.

Karen N.: That's exactly right, and everything is better together, if we can work on this together. There are some other things that could help with an organization's health, and that is looking at some data like health risk assessments. There's one that assesses even stress, and that's by the Centers for Disease Control, the CDC. They have an INPUTS survey. Let's use some of the tools that are out there. As an employer those could be promoted better, but also as an employee, please take advantage of those so that you can learn more about how you can be healthy more intentionally.

Katie Johnson: I should mention, one of the reasons we're talking about occupational health this week is because this is the week Lake Region Healthcare hosts the Corporate Cup, which is a time for businesses to get a team together, have some fun competing in some physical activities, some cooking activities, some teamwork-building activities. I would imagine that that's a tip that you would often share with employers, is find ways for your employees to work together on teamwork-building things outside of the workplace.

Karen N.: Yes, absolutely. Some of the things we assess, we have an organizational assessment that we give to the organizations that work with us. Some of the questions at the end of that assessment are, "Does your organization have community partnerships? Does it give back?" Also, "Are there team-building opportunities in your place of employment?" Those are all considered best practices for occupational health.

Katie Johnson: How about, on a personal note, what's your personal favorite way to keep your occupational health in top form?

Karen N.: Mine is physical activity. Like I said, finding some every day. It's sort of like my stress management tool. Everybody needs to find their own personal, and what fits

for them. An apple a day, hello? That could be the thing that gives you joy, or that helps you feel healthy. Find what gives you wellness joy, because then you're more willing to do it.

I talk about fun a lot because when I was in my early 20s and was teaching swimming lessons at a YMCA in the Twin Cities, when I was evaluated, she said, "Your kids are going to learn how to swim but they aren't having any fun, because you're like this drill sergeant." I'm glad I learned that in an early part of my life so I could incorporate it. I believe in fun. We all have to have something that gives us fun, and that helps with our purpose, too.

Katie Johnson: In your work for Partnership for Health, if there are listeners out there who are interested in the resources available to them for worksite wellness through Partnership for Health, what's available and how should they reach out to you to find out more?

Karen N.: I'm going to leave you my phone number. It's 701-371-9644. About every year and a half, we start a new collaborative of bringing 10-15 worksites together to learn all of these best practices. We'd love to hear from you. Again, it's Karen Nitzkorski at 701-371-9644.

Katie Johnson: Great. Karen, anything else you want to share with our listeners that I haven't asked you about today, as we think about making the most of our occupational health?

Karen N.: No, I just want to tell everybody to have fun!

Katie Johnson: Great advice, great advice. Karen, it's been fun having you on Apple a Day today. Thank you so much for sharing your knowledge with us. Again, Karen Nitzkorski, the worksite wellness and school coordinator for Partnership for Health, our guest today on Apple a Day as we talk about the occupational health of the seven components of wellness. During our community health challenge, a reminder if you haven't signed up, you still have until Friday, February 10th to join our Shoot for the Moon mission to watch the moon together as a community. You can do that at LRHC.org.

Karen, thanks again for joining me today.

Karen N.: Thank you very much.

Katie Johnson: Karen Nitzkorski and Katie Johnson on Apple a Day, reminding you there is so much to do here. Stay healthy for it. Have a great day.