

Issue #5



Improving Hospital Physical Activity Environments

The CDC supports making the healthy choice the easy choice in every community setting.

As major employers and health leaders, hospitals can help establish strong community norms for promoting healthy and active living through nutritious food and beverage, opportunities for physical activity, support for breastfeeding, and tobacco-free environments. This P2P Series presents case studies of hospitals improving their environment to better support the health of their employees and embody the mission of their organization.

IN THIS ISSUE...

Kaiser Permanente and Logansport Memorial Hospital talk about creating environments in and around their hospitals that encourage active living.

Building a Healthier Workplace

Kaiser Permanente has more than 160,000 employees in 8 separate regions across the country. Although the regions operate independently in many ways, Kaiser takes a comprehensive approach to health promotion for all of its areas of service. “Promoting physical activity starts in the way our facilities are designed and built” says Elisa Wong, Senior Program Manager. Kaiser has created guidance standards explicitly use the hospital built environment to promote active living. “There are standards for buildings to point toward pedestrian paths and maximize access to public transit” Wong says. There are specifications for using open spaces to create children’s play areas, exercise paths and gardens. Kaiser’s national Facilities Service Department is responsible for making sure the standards are adhered to as they work with contractors and developers. Kaiser ensures there is ample space for bicycle parking, safe crosswalks and whenever possible, well-lit and covered outdoor areas. These make the active option more accessible.

Wong thinks it is important not just to promote health because it will result in better health outcomes or cost savings, but because it is the right thing to do. “We have some indication that the right built environment will encourage healthier behaviors; and as an enterprise whose job it is to help sick people get healthy, we have an obligation to help people not get sick in the first place” she says. That can require shining a spotlight on the connection between the built environment and health for people outside of the health care sector: the planning community, builders, contractors, and real estate developers.

Beyond the built environment, Kaiser also offers various amenities and incentives to encourage active living. “In some regions we offer transit subsidies, rideshare programs and preferred carpool parking” says Wong. These services complement Kaiser’s employee wellness and community health efforts. “Across the organization we have this idea about what it means to be a total health organization; not just caring for patients when they are sick, but living up to our prevention mission” Wong says. Creating healthy hospital environments is one important way that this idea becomes reality.

Key Considerations

- *Building a healthy environment can be a foundation for creating a culture of health in the hospital.*
- *Reviewing current hospital policies can determine if they support the use of built environment features like grassy areas for physical activity.*
- *Connecting the built environment with health outcomes is important so all stakeholders understand the importance of active environments.*

Pathways to *Prevention*

Logansport is a rural community situated at the intersection of the Wabash and Eel Rivers in north central Indiana. Acres of mature forest and miles of riverbank set it apart from surrounding communities. In 2000, **Logansport Memorial Hospital (LMH)** and its Foundation (LMHF) wanted to convert abandoned railroad lines near the hospital into recreational trails to promote physical activity and make use of natural resources. A state grant provided funding to build the first trail. Soon after, the hospital board wanted to celebrate its 75th anniversary with “a gift of health and wellness to the community” says Shirley Crain, Planning Specialist at LMH, and they did so by kicking off a large-scale fundraising campaign to expand and improve the trail system. Generous contributions allowed the Eel River Bluff Trail to open in 2004. The handicap-accessible trail includes a canoe launch, bridges, rest stops and parking. More than 4,000 walkers per week prove the success of the initiative. “You go down there and see mom, dad and all the kids walking on a regular basis night and day” says Vicki Byrd, Vice President of Planning and Development. The hospital hosts races and walking events on the trail and incorporates it into their wellness program to encourage employees and their families to stay active.

In addition, LMHF opened the Hervey Preserve, 35 acres of donated land with a crushed-stone path for walking and biking. A walking labyrinth was added as part of Make a Difference Day, a United Way event and the foundation worked with local Eagle Scouts to complete a pavilion and bridge inside the preserve. “We have been able to bring a lot of community awareness to both trail systems because of the different partners we have had throughout the years” says Byrd.

The hospital maintenance department does a lot of the work to keep the areas clean and in good repair. “We are fortunate that our fundraising team thought ahead to make sure there was money to maintain the trails” says Byrd. An endowment fund was created and can be drawn from for repairs and maintenance. The hospital foundation also has a small group of community volunteers that help with upkeep. “Some of them have really taken ownership of the trail and that’s great” says Crain. The trails have become a source of pride for the community and the initiative continues. Plans are in place to open more land and connect to other trails across Logansport. “It’s important to think about where health and wellness fit into a community’s master plan and look at the overall health of the residents,” says Byrd. “It is key to look to the future and think about what else can be done and how to bring in other partners.”

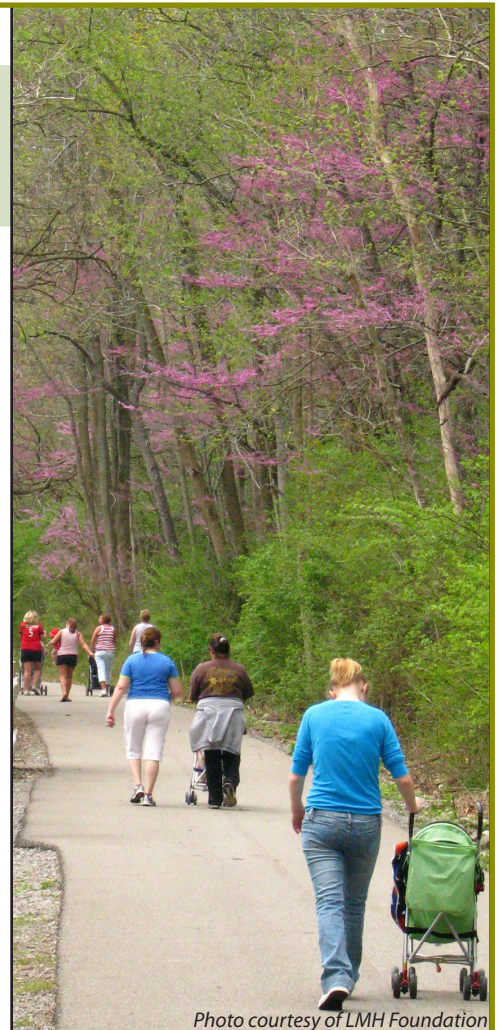


Photo courtesy of LMH Foundation

Key Considerations

- *Making use of existing natural resources and historical features can inspire healthy living.*
- *Partnering with community organizations helps create buy-in and raise awareness of hospital efforts.*
- *Encouraging the use of trails and activities the entire family can enjoy may help employees live a more active lifestyle.*

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