

Wellness for Everyone at Queen of the Valley Medical Center

Physicians, Staff, Patients and the Community Come Together to Achieve Better Health

By Stacy Schwan

Are health clubs only for healthy people?

Why is it that, vowing to get in shape or lose weight after the holidays, so many people plunk down their hard-earned cash to join the ranks of the treadmill-running, iron-pumping, abs-crunching gods and goddesses, only to abandon their resolution a few weeks later?

Is it because these people are too weak, too lazy or too busy to do what it takes to follow through on their commitments? Or could it be, for many of them, that when they finally rally the courage to dust off their sneakers and head for the gym, they end up feeling unwelcome, unsupported and out of place? Or perhaps their

motivation is simply drained by an environment that is unpleasant or just plain no fun?

What if there were a place these people could go to where, no matter who they are — senior citizen, recovering cancer patient, pregnant mom or triathlete in training — they had access to all the facilities, programs, guidance and camaraderie they needed to follow through and actually achieve their goals?

It was exactly these kinds of people that the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange had in mind when they created the Wellness Center on the campus of Napa's Queen of the Valley Medical Center.

Marko Bodor, M.D., and David Freeto, M.D., demonstrate some of the equipment at the 59,000-square-foot Wellness Center on the campus of Queen of the Valley Medical Center in Napa.



PHOTO BY KEITH B. DIXON



Not just a fancy rehabilitation center and much more than a fully featured health club, the 59,000-square-foot Wellness Center is designed to assist people wherever they may be on the continuum of health, from recovery and physical therapy, to health maintenance, to prevention.

Entering the modern, glass-fronted building, it is impossible not to be impressed by the striking architecture and open design of the visible spaces. Giant metal columns soar high above the light-filled atrium that comprises the main exercise area, its carpeted floor lined with row upon row of bicycles, elliptical trainers and state-of-the-art fitness equipment. Soothing colors and curved walls soften an otherwise industrial-looking interior, while a glass-enclosed, two-story administration area reminiscent of an air traffic control tower occupies the building's core.

Located on the second floor of this tower is the office of the center's Executive Director, Elizabeth Glenn-Bottari, M.A., R.N., CRRN. Her office windows provide a panoramic view of the entire fitness area, from the outdoor basketball court on the north side of the building to the two glassed-in swimming pools and whirlpool on the sunny south side.

THERE'S MORE TO BEING WELL THAN BEING FIT

Previously a rehabilitation director in occupational health and medicine, Glenn-Bottari has been the Executive Director of the Wellness Center since it opened in July 2006. "I've been part of it all along, from the time they said 'Let's go for it,'" she recalls.

"I love rehab, which is known as secondary prevention, so the concept of wellness — medical fitness and keeping people active, managing stress and all the other services we offer — really made good sense."

Glenn-Bottari says the concept of wellness resonates perfectly with the core mission of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange "to continually improve the health and quality of life of people in the communities we serve."

The central idea behind the wellness movement — that people can make lifestyle choices that enhance their own physical, mental and spiritual health — has been gaining momentum over the past three decades. As the costs of health care continue to skyrocket, more and more hospitals and medical institutions are embracing models of health care that focus on health maintenance and prevention, not just acute care for illness. The Wellness Center is one of approximately 1,800 facilities around the country that are incorporating a variety of preventive, complementary and lifestyle-change programs with traditional rehabilitative services, all in a high-end health club atmosphere.

Marko Bodor, M.D., is a physiatrist with a long list of specializations, including electrodiagnostic medicine, neurological and musculoskeletal diagnostic ultrasound, physical and sports medicine and rehabilitation. He is also the Wellness Center's in-house Medical Director, a point which, Glenn-Bottari maintains, is an important factor setting the center apart from other, more typical health clubs. "As a medical fitness center, our commitment is to participate with you in maintaining and improving your health and helping you make

those right lifestyle changes,” she says. “Having an in-house medical director and qualified staff is critical to doing that.”

On cursory observation, the vast array of programs and services offered at the center could appear disparate and unwieldy. After all, what does meditation have to do with mammography services, or a swimming class for people with arthritis? However, Dr. Bodor explains, each class, program and service is part of an integrative effort to promote what he refers to as “the five aspects of wellness: exercise, nutrition, sleep, prevention and the psychosocial aspect. I’d like to see all of those disciplines represented in this building,” he says.

Dr. Bodor laments the separation and compartmentalization that has become a necessary fact of medical life in many large institutions, because it often limits the ability to come up with synergistic and creative solutions to help patients solve their health dilemmas.

“I think what we do uniquely here at the Wellness Center is that we are bringing physical and rehabilitation medicine together with exercise physiology and physical therapy, occupational therapy [and] kinesiology, all in the same building, with opportunities for people to interact. We don’t follow formulas because we believe that current exercise prescriptions are only current. They’re not the next thing, and we want to be onto the next thing — we want to be better than that.”

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

In addition to physical rehabilitation, many of the Wellness Center’s integrative programs are designed to assist people living

with chronic illnesses to achieve optimal physical, mental and spiritual well-being. Programs include cardiac rehabilitation, cancer wellness and a diabetes wellness program that is recognized by the American Diabetes Association. An innovative “stress mastery” program utilizes techniques such as biofeedback, hypnosis and one-on-one counseling to equip individuals to lower stress, sustain lifestyle changes and manage chronic illness. Nutrition is integral to all programs, and a specific weight management program featuring the BodyBugg calorie management device is also available.

Patients are not the only people taking advantage of the center’s extensive facilities and services. Around 22% of the center’s 5,500 members are physicians and hospital employees, and 44% are individuals and families from the surrounding community who participate in the myriad programs and classes offered for people of all ages and abilities.

At the Synergy Medical Fitness Center (part of the Wellness Center), a dizzying array of classes is available to fit a wide variety of tastes and activity levels. From fast and furious classes like “Spinergy,” “Turbo Kick” and “Core Blast,” to kinder, gentler classes like yoga, tai chi and water aerobics, to more exotic offerings like Zumba, Feldenkrais and belly dancing, the center truly does offer something for everyone.

‘IT’S NOT ABOUT WHAT YOU LOOK LIKE ...’

Perhaps what is most appealing about the Wellness Center is also the most intangible. It is the comfortable feeling of belonging you

David Freeto, M.D., is a gastroenterologist who serves on the Wellness Center’s board of advisors.



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Around 22% of the center's 5,500 members are physicians and hospital employees.

get from the moment you walk through the door, no matter who you are or what your current state of health is.

Dr. David Freeto is a gastroenterologist who serves on the Wellness Center's board of advisors. He has been a member and enthusiastic advocate of the center since the day it opened.

"The nice thing about this gym is it doesn't cater just to muscle men and ladies in tight leotards," he says. "I've never been to a gym like this before, where you see such a wide spectrum of people. There's a whole bunch of healthy people, but there are also people in here for weight reduction programs. And they get right up on the equipment; they're not shy.

"There are also a lot of patients who've had illnesses — like diabetes or heart attacks — who have gone through the rehab program and now they're in their own personal exercise and health maintenance program. That's why I like it. It's nice to see a place where they are really interested in getting people who aren't usually gym-type people into exercise and improving their health."

Glenn-Bottari agrees that the diversity of clientele is one of the things that makes the Wellness Center so unique. "I often hear people say, 'I would never have joined a health club' or, 'I would never, ever put on a bathing suit!' But when you walk in here, people have that comfort. It's not about what you look like; it's about what you're doing."

It's not just that patients can exercise alongside nonpatients, and that physically challenged people can feel as comfortable as those who are more physically fit, Glenn-Bottari says. Beyond that, she

sees the social and family interactions that develop as being among the center's greatest benefits.

"This is where generations come to be active together," she says, noting as evidence the FitKids FitZone program that recently opened for kids 7-13 years old, thus offering both kids and their parents the chance to work out at the same time.

On the other end of the age spectrum, Glenn-Bottari says, "It's a pleasure when you see 90-year-olds come in here as husband and wife, and they have a purpose. They're coming in together, they're doing something they enjoy, and guess what? They're meeting friends here, too."

MORE TO BE DONE

For all the hustle and bustle of activity around the facility, Dr. Bodor says there are still many things yet to be done. "We're only about halfway there. We're always adding things and perfecting things," he says, pointing to the very recent addition of a babysitting and supervised child activity area, and the soon-to-be additions of acupuncture and aesthetician services. He says he'd also like to have a sleep program on site, as sleep is the only component of his "five aspects of wellness" not currently being addressed at the center.

As for Dr. Freeto? He'd be happy with just one more addition to the facility. "I'm always trying to talk Elizabeth [Glenn-Bottari] into getting a climbing wall," he chuckles. "It's a bit of a problem figuring where to put it because it takes up a big space ... but we'll get one here eventually." ■