

Redefining Wellness in Senior Living

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The workout selfie: emblematic of a culture that has been swept away by the fitness craze. As the rest of the world becomes more in tune with this way of life, so too has senior living.

But providers are reinventing the way “wellness” is perceived in the industry — starting by offering more than just state-of-the-art gyms and fitness classes.

For many, the concept of wellness involves the whole person, and it centers around six dimensions: social, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, vocational and, of course, physical.

Respondents in a team of industry experts’ most recent survey, released last year, reported that wellness programs affected health care operations costs, use of the health care center and use of medication, and also reduced emergency room visits, hospital readmissions and falls.

Additionally, wellness programs had an impact on resident and family member satisfaction and on move-in decision-making, with 90% to 91% of respondents rating wellness programs as important in these areas.

Presbyterian Village North (PVN) has nearly 500 residents and offers a number of programs aimed at improving each resident’s mind, body and spirit.

The community’s holistic approach to wellness includes, among other initiatives, a Wellness University, laughter yoga, a Spiritual Life team, and plans for a new 6,000-square-foot wellness facility.

Whole-person wellness is not just one or two of the dimensions; it’s a combination of all of them. Every department works together to provide those wellness activities to make sure the residents are getting what they need.

1. Social

Life Enrichment staff at PVN focus on the social aspect of wellness, although much of the programming at the community is a result of partnerships across several departments. One example of social programming is offering cooking classes for residents, where they can learn more about cooking techniques and also socialize with each other.

The community’s amenities also include a 250-seat performing arts center and additional meeting rooms.

It’s amazing how engaged so many people are. The old notion of retiring and sitting in a rocking chair is long gone.

2. Emotional

Laughter yoga is an exercise routine that combines deep breathing from yoga and laughter to oxygenate participants’ brains, making them feel healthier and more energetic. The concept of laughter yoga is based on a scientific fact that the body cannot differentiate between fake and real laughter. One gets the same physiological and psychological benefits.

The technique has proven to change participants’ moods, reduce stress, strengthen the immune system, improve relationships, and create a positive mental state.

3. Intellectual

PVN has offered Wellness University, a semester-long program meant to encourage learning and resident participation. PVN integrates each of the six dimensions of wellness into classes taught by staff members and outside experts. Roughly 80 residents participated last spring.

Additionally, PVN launched a five-day “brain camp” this year, and offers “brainercize” classes weekly. . It encourages people to have an incentive to try new things.”

4. Spiritual

As a faith-based organization, PVN has a full-time chaplain and offers weekly worship services. However, the community also looks at “spirituality” in a broader light, helping residents become more connected with themselves and with nature.

Last month, it gathered residents for a sunrise devotion. Its tai chi and meditation classes relieve stress and promote calmness. A “relax and unwind” class helps quiet residents’ minds. And a Spiritual Life team is available for support.

5. Vocational (Occupational)

Among PVN’s amenities are woodworking, computer, business and sewing centers, where residents can gather to cultivate their hobbies, develop interests and learn new skills. This dimension of wellness also includes volunteering, something the community strongly encourages.

Among the resident organizations at PVN are a sewing group and a woodworking group, both of which donate many of their projects to people inside and outside the community.

6. Physical

PVN currently has a wellness center which houses equipment and space for its 50 weekly fitness classes, as well as an aquatics and rehabilitation therapy center fit with a therapy pool, an underwater treadmill, gait monitoring, and massage jets.

Currently under renovation, PVN will also add another dining space: a healthy lifestyles cafe with a fruit and yogurt bar. Inside the new fitness center there will also be a spa and a clinic with access to physicians.

“It’s exciting to see that health and wellness is such an important part here at the retirement community. People want to live their lives well, and retirement should be about doing the things you love and staying active.”

The views expressed here are those of Ms. Emily Study, and do not necessarily represent those of the Commission or individual members. We thank the publication Senior Housing News for the opportunity to reprint this article of interest for the Older Adults in our community.