

THE NURSE WILL SEE YOU NOW [IN THE LIBRARY]

HEALTH AND WELLNESS PROGRAMMING IDEAS FOR YOUR COMMUNITY



With healthcare costs continuously on the rise, libraries can serve as a convenient haven for much more than just research and information. This year, as annual **U.S. healthcare spending hits more than \$3.8 trillion** according to a recent Forbes.com article, the Healthcare Reform Act has been urging Americans to focus on prevention and wellness programs to improve their overall health. This message is also creating opportunities for libraries to provide cost-effective, informative and motivational programs and sessions on preventative health, nutrition and much more. Programming ideas like the ones below not only promote access to health resources, teach healthy habits and support those going through medical issues, but also help enrich the lives of entire communities.

The Paschalville Library in Philadelphia, PA, worked with the University of Philadelphia School of Nursing to offer innovative, healthy living programs specifically targeted toward children. Four students worked with young library patrons to offer eleven free health-related programs including sessions on healthy eating, the importance of exercise and how to control asthma. During “Chop! Chop! Making Healthy Choices & Snacks,” kids learned how to make better food choices while coloring and playing bingo. “Moving and Grooving: Fitness for Kids” brought kids outside to get bodies moving with yard games and dancing. Children’s librarian Jamie Bowers stated that the best part was that, “Our kids got to spend time with a great group of patient adults who could answer their health questions and take time to listen to their stories.”

While many library staffs are often well trained in community resources, they may not be equipped to help community members with social services or health issues. In January 2012, the Pima County Library partnered with the Pima County Health Department to hire a public health nurse for the 27-branch library system to assist patrons with social, behavioral, health and emotional issues. The resources provided by the nurse were not designed to replace healthcare services, but rather to give patients, in partnership with their healthcare team, the knowledge and tools necessary to make informed health decisions and get the care they deserve. In the first ten weeks, the hired public health nurse made over 650 one-on-one contacts with library customers at six Pima County library branches. The healthcare-focused role has been such a huge help to library staff that they are in talks with the University of Arizona’s School of Nursing to place nursing students in “service learning positions” across several branches.

For those suffering from life-altering health issues, libraries are also developing programs and resources to help patrons and their families find support. Located in Kansas City, MO, the Mid-Continent Public Library’s desire to help those affected by cancer led to the creation of Pink Parties, which are get-togethers that emphasize education, community and support for those with breast cancer. These events serve as a venue to discuss the psychological, emotional and psychological challenges of cancer and are created with the assistance of library partners like cancer foundations, hospitals and medical practitioners. With a purpose to “reach out, touch lives and understand,” Pink Parties started in 2010 with 96 attendees and nearly tripled in size by the next year; however, the true mark of success for this program is the amazing stories of hope, love and support provided by the attendees.

Libraries serve as the hub of communities for many reasons, and the addition of more health and wellness programs could not only enhance current offerings but also save lives. As patients take a more proactive role in

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living healthier lives, public libraries can help patrons find the information they need for better self-care, present methods to improve their quality of life and much more. By extending the role of your library to include providing health resources to your community, you’ll help foster stronger, healthier and happier citizens.

Health programming for young patrons and on staff nurses are not the only health-related resources libraries are tapping into to improve lives.

Some libraries are catering to specific health problems, like the San Antonio Public Library’s partnership with the San Antonio Food Bank:

- ♥ Help combat obesity through educational programs aimed at teens to teach prevention.
- ♥ Providing the opportunity to learn new ways to eat healthy and how to make better nutrition choices.
- ♥ Hands-on cooking demonstrations taught teens how to cook for themselves while preparing lighter, healthier versions of some of their favorite meals.
- ♥ Teach teens how to read packaging labels and how to wash their favorite fruits and vegetables.

Thanks to the library’s success with the program, six additional branches have created plans to include nutrition programming in their own teen programs.