JOURNEY TO WELLNESS: AN INTEGRATED CLINICAL COACHING MODEL FOR MANAGING CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS

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Over the past 30 years a wealth of evidence has been published and information provided to the public in regards to physical activity, proper nutrition and other wellness associated behaviors that both prevent and minimize the effects of chronic diseases. Despite this abundance of information, continued patterns of de-conditioning, poor food choices and other adverse health behaviors have combined to create an increasing trend in chronic health conditions and associated morbidity, mortality and healthcare cost.

Allopathic western medical training focuses on the analysis of presenting clinical signs and symptoms via a detailed history and selected medical tests to formulate a diagnosis and treatment strategy. This treatment plan is then directed to the patient by the medical practitioner, frequently with minimal patient input. While generally effective in the acute and emergency settings, this “expert” approach has had minimal impact with creating lasting health behavior change in people with chronic conditions. Human beings tend to resist directive advice, even when it is in their own best interest, with a flurry of excuses, denial and desire to be autonomous.

Health and Wellness coaching has rapidly gained traction over the past few years as a collaborative, patient focused approach that enables people to take responsibility for their health and make meaningful and lasting behavior change. Training clinicians and allied healthcare professionals in the skills associated with wellness coaching can be a powerful strategy toward empowering people to take responsibility for their own health and ultimately lowering health care costs.

The Summit Medical Fitness Center has developed and implemented a multi-disciplinary, clinically integrated program (Journey to Wellness) that utilizes a wellness coaching model as the underlying platform for patients with chronic health conditions. Program “coaches” include clinical exercise physiologists, physicians, nurses and other health professionals who are trained and certified wellness coaches. A variety of coaching strategies and innovative technological tools are used to gradually encourage initiation and progression of physical activity and improvement in other health related behaviors.

Outcome data on 823 participants (203 male, 620 female) that have completed the program indicate significant changes in: Quality of Life (Dartmouth); Depression (PHQ-9); Anxiety (GAD-7), Perceived Pain; Positivity Index; Body Composition (Wt, BMI, Body Fat%, Waist Circumference); and weekly exercise duration.

This presentation will provide a background of health and wellness coaching, associated key competencies, and education/certification requirements. The background information will be followed by a review of the peer-reviewed literature and the specific components of the Journey to Wellness program and its associated outcomes. Finally, the presentation will summarize strategies, including the use of innovative technology, for implementing a cost effective program in smaller, more remote settings, where resources and health care services are limited.