

**Rural Health Development Council
Strong Rural Communities Initiative
Steering Committee Minutes
December 11, 2008**

Attendees (in person and by conference call): Dr. Sayed Ahmed (Medical College of WI), Linda Bishop (Sauk County), Dr. Byron Crouse (UW School of Medicine and Public Health), Joel Davidson (Southwest WI AHEC), Sue Duffy (Sawyer County), John Eich (WI Office of Rural Health), Eric Gass (Medical College of WI), Jessica Kerner (Langlade County), Liz Lund (Jackson County), Marty Schaller (Manitowoc County), Tim Size (Rural WI Health Cooperative), Amy Wergin (Manitowoc County), and Kevin Jacobson (WI Office of Rural Health, recorded these minutes).

Tim Size convened the meeting at 9:05a.

Sayed Ahmed announced that the Healthier WI Partnership Program has reviewed its finances and will ask grantees to reduce their unspent grant balance by 20% effective January 1. This will affect 50-60 Medical College of WI programs. Program staff will call each program to explain the situation. In response to a question, Tim Size said programs will probably be able to negotiate a reduction in deliverables. He also reminded everyone that this announcement only impacts the three MCW affiliated programs (Langlade, Manitowoc and Waupaca). There's been no word from the UW Partnership Program on reductions for Hayward, Sauk or Black River Falls. Byron Crouse added that the UW Program is looking at other methods to reduce expenses rather than reducing current grants.

Program updates:

Sauk

- Working with Universal Tool and Die, organized a worksite wellness committee and using John Morgan's [Worksite Wellness Resource Kit](#).
- Developed an employee survey, worksite assessment, began a wellness bulletin board display, reviewing vending machine choices, presented a holiday stress workshop and are investigating community activity options.
- Post-grant, they've applied for one of Morgan's "obesity" grants to work with grocers on healthy choices and with senior and community centers on education, activities and classes. They intend to continue with some of these whether they receive the grant or not.
- They will offer some services for a fee. John Eich suggested a market analysis to see what's currently offered in the area and at what cost.

Langlade

- They've added three more worksites and are doing HRAs and developing programming. Budget cuts may impact whether they add more worksites.

- Will meet with hospital administration on whether hospital will fund a permanent wellness position and they will use evidence from Black River Falls that a position could be sustainable.
- Post-grant, they've already taken on additional employers so they shouldn't have problems continuing the program.

Manitowoc

- The wellness committee meets quarterly and participating businesses and others are using their online wiki group.
- Post-grant they will continue to staff the committee with a public health nurse. If employers see the value in HRAs (which the grant now funds), they could cover this cost in the future in addition to the programming which they now pay for. They will coordinate worksite wellness programs with community wide public health campaigns (smoking, etc.) as a way to sustain the program.

Hayward

- A hospital wellness program began with 80 participants (out of ~200 employees). Program includes weekly challenges and speakers. Administration expected ~25 participants. Tim Size noted that a regional survey found that hospitals are **not** the leaders in worksite wellness.
- More Energy, the program for chronic disease patients, has increased to 54 participants.

Black River Falls

- Continue to work with the school district and a small manufacturer. Also with Walmart and other smaller employers outside the grant on a fee basis. They've been approached by a construction company to provide services to five sites across WI and MN.
- Asked to comment on confidentiality and effectiveness, Liz Lund said face to face contact with a neutral third party is more effective than simply giving out coupons for HRAs or encouragement from management. The hospital uses a third party to conduct HRAs rather than do them in house and participation rates are now higher.

Joel Davidson asked if any employers have reported decreases in insurance premiums due to wellness programs? Liz Lund reported that one employer has determined that a one point increase in HRA scores translates to a 1.8% decrease in insurance costs. Tim said the ability of employees to change insurance coverage is a disincentive for insurers to support wellness programs—an employee can improve their health and change to another carrier.

Waupaca was not able to make the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 10:00.