

CASE STUDY



GREEN ADVOCATES AND SUSTAINABLE WORK SPACE CERTIFICATION

Advocate Health Care strives to create a culture of conservation and improve the health of people and the environment. At Advocate, conserving natural resources is one facet of their commitment to health.

They see sustainability initiatives as an important part of wellness and managing health care costs. To motivate and engage staff, Advocate focuses on communication, education and recognition programs. These efforts are intended to win the hearts and minds of staff and motivate them to take action at work to reduce waste and energy and support healthier spaces. Two of the programs developed to do this are the Green Advocate Program and the Sustainable Work Space Program.

Program Details

In order for Advocate Health Care to achieve its goal of health and wellness for all, it requires education and communication across the 12 hospital system, the medical group and clinics. Top down communication is one thing, but to bring programming to the next level, people have to live it. Advocate leadership recognizes that a commitment to healthier environments helps to both support personal health and minimize health care costs. The foundational message for Advocate's communication and education programming connects how environmental health is essential for human health to thrive.

Green Advocate and Sustainable Workspace Checklist: The Green Advocate program was developed to extend sustainability initiatives to the departmental level and increase staff engagement across the system. The program empowers passionate associates so that they have an increased role in sustainability programming. While the system drives

Advocate Health Care

Advocate is named among the nation's top five largest health systems based on quality by Truven Analytics and is the largest health system in Illinois. The faith-based, not-for-profit health system is located in Downers Grove, Illinois



A Life of its Own

While system strategies and Green Advocates build upon environmental improvements, other projects have developed organically. The culture is created where passionate individuals can take on a project, get others involved and it takes on a life of its own. An example of this is gardening. Workers have engaged around community gardening and kindness to the planet earth. Numerous Associates have been involved with gardening projects. At Advocate Sherman Hospital, a team of leaders organized the creation of community garden of 53 beds on the hospital's campus for staff and community members to tend to during the growing season. Their surplus harvest is donated to a local food pantry. In another similar example, Advocate Good Shepherd Hospital has partnered with Smart Farm, a local nonprofit, to build a high tunnel hoop house and outdoor garden to grow vegetables solely for donating to a local food pantry. Staff at the hospital volunteer time tending the garden and the hospital kitchen donates food waste for garden compost. Farmers markets are also held on several of the hospital's campuses during the summer months and coupled with healthy eating and seasonal recipe sharing.

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Branding for Sustainability

To further strengthen the relationship between the environment and human health, Advocate branded their environmental stewardship and associate health and wellness partnership as *Healthy*

Environment—for the quarterly dashboard, computer-based training, annual report and award program.

Recognition

Prior to 2015 there was an annual event recognizing associates that demonstrate going above and beyond in environmental stewardship. In 2015 the team created a program that recognizes associates that are excellent environmental stewards AND healthy champions, bringing together sustainability and health. The language is woven into the health and wellness program and stories featuring healthy journeys are featured in email blasts.

Peers are nominated for their accomplishments in energy, water and waste conservation, weight loss, team work, collecting materials and more. A team reviews the nominations and each year identifies 25 winners from across the system, with at least one winner from each site. In 2015, winners included several physicians and nurses and a variety of associates from various departments. The method of awards and recognition leads to fantastic opportunities for storytelling. Winners are appreciated, honored and enjoy a breakfast with their CEO, where they bring their family, have their photograph taken and tell their story. Photographs are shared and in 2014 a video was developed to showcase the stories. The event is an opportunity for Jim Skogbsbergh, Advocate's president and CEO, to talk about Advocate's values, mission, innovation, stewardship, health and wellness and to give a deserved

pat on the back for a job well done. The Vice President of Mission and Spiritual Care does an invocation to kick off the event. Those that are not selected from the nomination, still get a thank you letter from the sustainability team, with a copy to their direct manager or supervisor and the colleague who nominated them. In 2014, Green Advocate buttons were created and sent along with the thank you note. A nomination is an honor—and it's important to lift people up and celebrate their accomplishments.



Communication

The constant question for the system is “How do we engage?” and this is an important question for all to consider in the complex health care system. In a world of competing initiatives, consistent messaging and keeping it fresh, simple and fun are key to success. A critical partner in sustainability and wellness programming is public affairs, who creates the messaging. Communication is challenging in health care—and requires varying strategies, depending on the audience. For example, emailing is not a successful strategy for

many nurses at Advocate because they simply do not access email habitually as part of their work day. A variety of communication strategies are identified from emails to Facebook, an intranet web page, poster campaign, annual training and Instagram, to name a few. Messaging is “bite-size” information to increase understanding and to keep it simple. Advocate’s environmental stewardship, communications and organizational development team collaborated on the development of a computer-based tutorial on sustainability and health. The tutorial attempts to connect the dots between sustainability and health, why it is relevant and important and how each person can make choices each day to support environmental and personal health simultaneously. Participation in the tutorial enters them into a raffle for an iPad or a FitBit.

Another method of engagement is for managers to get their staff to take Advocate’s annual engagement survey. They are asked to measure the accuracy of this statement, “My site is environmentally responsible.” This survey question plants the seed around sustainability and healthier environments.

A formal sustainability report shares updates with staff, patients and the community and is featured on the website [Advocate Health Care Healthy Environment Report](#).

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Challenges

Managing a system strategy requires site-specific leadership awareness, addressing varying levels of awareness and a necessity to get in front of site leadership and bring them along. Each hospital facility, although part of the same system, has a unique culture and requires tailoring tactics and strategies to meet the goals.

What's Next

Advocate is developing a Healthy Spaces Roadmap, combining the checklists of the Green Guide for Health Care, Living Building Institute, LEED and Sustainable Sites Initiative to extend their work into ambulatory sites, physician offices and other consolidated practices to carry the commitment to green building and construction and operations.

Measuring Success

Advocate sets targets for number of Green Advocates, number of associates that participate in the staff satisfaction survey trend: *“My site is environmentally responsible.”*

