

Testimony of Kimberly A. Russel
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It's a pleasure to be here today to represent BryanLGH Health System, a locally owned health care system anchored by BryanLGH Medical Center here in Lincoln. The Mission Statement of BryanLGH Medical Center is to provide excellent care and promote health with a focus on quality, collaboration and compassion. This Mission Statement, with its emphasis on health promotion, showcases the importance of prevention and wellness.

Today, I will share with you some new research that we are studying in collaboration with other Lincoln partners.

In June, the Community Health Endowment and BryanLGH Health System co-sponsored a site visit to Lincoln by Dan Buettner, a researcher and author of a book called "*The Blue Zones*." The book presents Dan's research of four areas of the world where people are living longer and healthier (into their 90's and beyond). The four areas Dan studied are in Italy, Japan, Costa Rica, and Loma Linda, California. Dan and his team of researchers have recently begun another study in Albert Lea, Minnesota.

We had standing room only in the BryanLGH Medical Center Conference Center with over 400 people in attendance to hear the results of Dan's work.

I found his message particularly interesting in the context of the national discussion that is ongoing about health care reform. The common themes that Dan discovered when researching longevity trends in these disparate areas of the world are actually quite simple, practical and do not rely upon legislation. Although some of the advice are things we have heard our whole lives such as walking, sustaining regular low intense activity throughout the day and adding activity into our daily routines, others are perhaps newer concepts to many Americans.

For example, Dan discovered that in Okinawa it is built into the culture to stop eating when one's stomach is 80% full. Another study showed that people who place their food on the plate in the kitchen, then put the food away before taking the plate to the table to eat, consume 14% less food those who place the serving dishes on the table. Another simple tip that Dan found in his studies were that the longevity or "blue zone" people used smaller dinner plates and glasses.

Other advice relates to adding social activity and family time to one's schedule every day and to surround yourself with people who share the same wellness values (kind of a support group concept).

Dan is now working in Albert Lea, Minnesota, where he is trying to create a new "blue zone". The entire Albert Lea community is working together to implement the principles of the "blue zones" found around the world.

Dan returned to Lincoln earlier this week for further discussion with Lincoln partners including BryanLGH, Community Health Endowment, City of Lincoln, Lincoln Public Schools and others to see what more we can learn about making Lincoln the next blue zone. I invite Congressman Fortenberry and other interested individuals to keep abreast of these developments as we all learn more.

In summary, we have an epidemic of obesity and diabetes and other related complications in this country. What is needed is a change in the American culture. Certainly, federal health policy and insurance reform can greatly contribute to this effort. So can enlightened employers who give employees incentives to lead healthier lifestyles. But, our basic practices as a country must change. I am hoping that here at home we can learn some simple lessons from researchers like Dan Buettner and his colleagues that will make a difference here in Nebraska.