

**The Subcommittee on Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition, and Forestry**  
**Congressional Field Hearing**  
**Madonna ProActive – Lincoln, Nebraska**  
**August 5, 2009**

My name is Marsha Lommel and I am President and CEO of Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital in Lincoln, Nebraska. Madonna is the only freestanding rehabilitation hospital in Nebraska and the only facility in the country with a Long Term Care Hospital and an Acute Rehabilitation Hospital under one roof. Madonna also has a nursing home, an assisted living facility, a large outpatient program, an occupational health program and a medical fitness center, ProActive, your host for today's hearing. Madonna specializes in rehabilitation for adults and children with traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury, stroke, pulmonary disease and pediatrics. In fact, Madonna has one of only 7 accredited pediatric brain injury programs in the nation and is one of only 4 to offer an accredited pediatric spinal cord injury program.

What does rehabilitation have to do with wellness? We believe the rehabilitation model lends itself to wellness because rehabilitation is holistic, that is, it does not focus on a body part or a disease like the traditional western model of medicine. Rehabilitation focuses on a person's ability to fulfill their life roles through health in all dimensions--emotionally, physically, vocationally, socially, spiritually and intellectually. In fact, those are the dimensions of wellness incorporated in the ProActive Wellness Assessment, a tool developed by our research institute. Along with a Health Risk Assessment, the ProActive Wellness Assessment allows members to move beyond diet and exercise alone, beyond health risk, to address issues that are preventing them from making positive changes in their lives. One of the most significant of these identified by national studies as well as our own experience, is stress management.

Second, rehabilitation emphasizes that each dimension of a person affects all other dimensions. We know, for example, that a simple walking program increases satisfaction in social and emotional, as well as physical, dimensions. And last, rehabilitation accommodates each person at their level of functioning. One ProActive member's goal was to do anything for 5 minutes. She started by walking in the cross current water track with the current to ease her mobility...and later progressed to full participation in water and land exercise.

We all know that many of the things that have been tried to improve the health of society at large have not been successful. These include scaring people, one size fits all programs and a sole focus on medication or disease management. People are not their diseases. Often wellness programs attract the healthiest people, and those with chronic conditions and obesity are too embarrassed or too intimidated, or have already experienced too much

failure, to participate. We have found that the most important first step for these people is to feel comfortable in the situation, and see that they are on the journey with people like them. That is why the non-fit and the moderately fit population do not feel comfortable in a traditional fitness facility with the younger or more athletic clientele.

ProActive has almost 3800 members and a little more than half of them are considered non traditional members of a fitness club. In an early study of our membership, 66% were overweight, 70% had inadequate fitness level, 74% were at an elevated risk for cancer, 45% were over 50 years of age and 40% of those had significant health impairments or disabilities, 36% had a moderate to high risk of coronary artery disease. These are the health problems of America. But when we look at the underlying attitudes and beliefs of this population, it is apparent that there are significant obstacles in the ability to change. 33% did not feel confident in their ability to succeed in a fitness plan, 17% reported excessive stress and poor coping skills.

At ProActive, we have seen thousands of people regain health through a holistic approach. A 42 year old woman avoided gastric bypass surgery, losing 114 pounds and reducing her triglycerides by 100 points. She states she didn't feel "one bit intimidated at ProActive" and when she described her outcome, she said "Emotionally, I'm so much happier." The women in her aquatic classes have become such good friends, they recently rewarded themselves with a group trip to Kansas City. That is the power of the holistic approach and a concentration on all of the dimensions of wellness.

A 67 year old woman who has had 3 strokes, was diabetic and had high blood pressure and high cholesterol, is now off most medications and is an avid participant in the senior tap dancing classes at ProActive. She said "I needed a place where I felt comfortable. It's better than any medicine."

Successful programming, we have found, is based on the holistic model of rehabilitation. It means including an element of fun, an element of competition and a focus on grouping people with similar characteristics and problems. It means dance classes with participants at any skill level. It means paired and group competitions with prizes (even small ones will do), healthy cooking classes, women's and men's groups, classes for seniors, programs like MedFit for those with medical issues and chronic conditions, and special classes like Adaptive Training for those with physical impairments. Our research institute conducted a two-year research project to adapt commercial fitness equipment so it can be used by those with physical limitations such as those who are partially paralyzed due to strokes, have arthritis or have neuromuscular problems such as MS.

As you look around you at ProActive, you will see that it was designed to address the psychological and spiritual aspects of wellness, as well as the physical. The goal was to

make ProActive entirely different from a typical fitness center so that people who would never set foot in a traditional fitness center, as well as the body building athlete, would feel comfortable here. And they all do. It is a place of energy as well as contemplation. It is accessible to, and welcoming to, those in wheelchairs and with walkers, the elderly and medically fragile. The cross current water track and the simple-to-use circuit were all designed for non-fit and moderately fit members.

The staff of three nurses, two dietitians, five physical therapists, exercise trainers, lifestyle coaches, dance instructors and group instructors address the needs of each member individually, starting with health risk and wellness assessments and individual counseling. ProActive provides medically supervised programs for people with cardiac conditions, arthritis, fibromyalgia, and diabetes. Our success in developing this model has resulted in positive, life enhancing outcomes that have exceeded our expectations.

Madonna's occupational health program, Fit For Work, provides occupational health and work injury services to 43 businesses in and around Lincoln. Working in partnership with businesses and their employees, the expensive costs of worker's compensation, time loss and decreased productivity can all be greatly diminished. Fit for Work staff provided over 1,300 health screens and delivered over 7,300 flu shots to these businesses as well as for the State of Nebraska workers.

Fit for Work incorporated the holistic philosophy of ProActive and developed a wellness initiative to augment its occupational health services. Fit for Work is currently providing wellness services to over 25 companies employing approximately 5,500 employees. Services include Health Screenings for early detection of health risks, Wellness presentations, Weight Loss programs, Tobacco Cessation programs, Nutrition and Wellness Coaching, Walking programs, Stress Management, Fitness classes and medically based programming. The approach is truly health care and prevention verses sick care.

Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital also uses the Fit for Work wellness program for our 1400 employees. Because we are self insured, our cost for employee healthcare can be tracked fairly accurately. In the past 5 years, the total cost to Madonna for healthcare, per employee, has increased 8% or an average of 1.76% per year.

Thus far, 773 employees have participated and 433 have completed at least one Fit for Work wellness program, one of which is the Lifestyle Challenge. This program offers free screenings, regular weigh-ins, health tips and prizes. Outcomes of wellness programs, like rehabilitation, must be tracked over many years to evaluate their true contribution to health. Because of the cost involved in applying research methodology, it is prohibitive for businesses to obtain reliable and valid outcomes or conduct blind studies.

However, Fit for Work does track outcomes for each initiative and program and I can give you a sample of those results. In the “Get In the Game Season Training” program 97% of the participants stated that they learned healthier behaviors at the live events and 70% took action steps to incorporate new choices into their lifestyle. The “Holiday Jumpstart” initiative for weight maintenance led to 71% of participants meeting or exceeding their goals, with 55% even losing weight over the holiday season between November and January. The impact of these events at Madonna has been echoed at the other businesses that implemented the Fit For Work wellness plan.

We also found that we were able to attract employees with the highest health risk to participate, which is often cited as a problem for wellness programs. For example, 69% of our employees participating in the Lifestyle Challenge met the body mass index categorization of overweight or obese. 78% of the overweight or obese employees lost weight, 23 of whom decreased their weight so significantly that they lowered their body mass index risk category.

Another example of the success of Lifestyle Challenge is the subjective evaluation results gathered at the end of each competition. Examples of employee’s perceptions of their health changes through the program include 55% who said they felt happier with themselves, 52% reported having more energy and 24% reported a decrease in stress levels.

With 1,400 employees working shifts around the clock and at locations scattered throughout Lincoln, Fit For Work wellness programming has continued to be creative in finding ways to reach busy workers in the challenging field of health care. Program design allows for all shifts to participate and often the education comes to them. Rolling carts from unit to unit with healthy snacks and educational presentations on nutrition or stress management or exercise, our wellness staff are able to give personal attention to employees who may never attend one of the more formal sessions. The focus is on real life challenges such as the miles it takes to walk off a stadium hot dog or the best and worst choices for breakfast cereal.

Another successful example is the walking program, in which participants are given pedometers and departments compete for most steps, or most improvement or even most participation. Groups of employees are now seen walking the 23 acre campus on breaks and over lunchtime.

We saw a ten-fold increase in our wellness programming engagement when fun and surprise events were incorporated. Successful wellness programs feel private and personal to participants, yet also foster the camaraderie of developing a healthier workplace culture.

It has to meet the needs of the most sedentary staff member and the weekend athlete. It has to help each person feel like their day-to-day choices shape their health.

Wellness is about personal touch and connection. With confusion generated by sound bite media messages, employees need to be able to access information and participate in programs that are relevant to them and fit into their lives.

We are finding similar results at the companies served by Fit for Work. Of the 2400 employees who took the health risk assessment, 74% had a higher risk of cancer, 70% had poor fitness levels, 66% were above the recommended weight, 64% need to improve nutrition and 35% had moderate to high risk of coronary artery disease. Each company has its own profile and an individualized program to meet its unique needs and budget. For example, in one company, almost 90% of employees were smokers. In other companies, sedentary work is a contributing factor to health risk.

The Lifestyle Challenge is one example of a team focused, weight and physical activity challenge. 900 members of 5 different businesses who were part of the programming lost over 2,400 pounds and logged over 36,400 hours of physical activity above and beyond their typical workday activity.

These are measureable examples of the outcomes for one approach to improving health and wellness. As our nation moves forward with the prospect of providing health care for all, it should keep in mind that life saving is not the only responsibility we have in healthcare. If we do not include rehabilitation and wellness, the economic burden will continue to be devastating. We need more medical wellness centers like ProActive and BryanLGH's LifePoint, we need to include coverage for medical wellness programs in insurance plans and in Medicare and Medicaid. We need to fund research at the grass roots level to identify best practices in wellness and establish long term results.

I urge the committee to include rehabilitation and wellness in the healthcare reform bills that are weaving through congress. You may save some lives, as well as ease the healthcare financial burden.

Marsha Lommel  
President and CEO  
Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital  
Lincoln, Nebraska