

April 24, 2014

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Healthcare is no longer about “repair.” It’s about “prevention.”

Prevention is rapidly becoming the goal of successful communities and healthcare systems as our entire nation focuses on living longer, happier and healthier lives. Our goal is to decrease sickness, which in turn will lower costs.

In this quest, NCH is actively collaborating, sharing best practices, learning from others, and now most importantly, demonstrating success with reproducible and robust execution. We, along with likeminded local organizations and individuals, are leading all of southwest Florida, both coastal and inland, to a healthier life style, ultimately to change our culture and serve as a huge economic benefit and catalytic attraction.

With these goals in mind, NCH Chief Development Officer **Jim Martin** and I visited Iowa to see what we might learn from the 10th healthiest state in our nation. (Florida, by the way, is ranked 30th by Gallup-Healthways.) In Iowa, 93 cities applied to become *Blue Zones*, where more people live longer and healthier, and 10 were selected to start. (<http://www.healthways.com/>)

I spent a day with Tony Buettner, Project Manager of Iowa’s Blue Zones Communities project, who took me on a tour of Cedar Falls, whose two-year-old Blue Zone program has already demonstrated objective success: 30% of the population has pledged to participate; there’s been a 5% decrease in weight on average with a similar drop in cholesterol; and there’s a discernibly more prideful community culture. We met with the mayor, a University of Northern Iowa human resource leader and a director of food services, and also a charismatic registered dietician, who is full time at the local HyVee, a large supermarket comparable to our Publix.

Here is the recurring message we heard from these leaders: *“We have pride in our change, we have become closer as a community, people are using the walking/exercise paths nine months of the year, elementary school students are growing gardens at school and learning about vegetables, bike paths and walking paths are interconnecting, and there is even early evidence of decreased wear and tear to college dormitories where students have come together to be healthier and more environmentally responsible.”* We drove down a pedestrian-friendly downtown street. There were no signs of the empty store fronts you see in other cities, and I couldn’t help but think this street was more economically successful than your average road engineered for car traffic.

That night, Jim and I watched with envy at the Blue Zones Project City Kickoff as Dan Buettner, Iowa City’s mayor and the executive vice president of Wellmark—sponsor for Iowa’s Blue Zones Project and equivalent of our Florida Blue—all addressed an enthusiastic audience of 400, most of whom took the pledge to adopt at least one behavior *“to make the healthy choice, the easier choice.”* Throughout Iowa, policies have been changed, environments modified, schools, worksites, supermarkets, and restaurants adapted, with an overall culture of health infused into communities. (<http://www.bluezones.com/>) Iowa is a wonderful model for us and for our state.

Here, too, we live in a wonderful area which we all enjoy. But we can improve. We have opportunity to live in an even better community; where increasingly prevalent chronic illnesses, such as diabetes, can be averted; where children can grow up with healthy eating habits; where tobacco use can be diminished; and where we can all come together in an environment where the healthy choice is the easiest choice.

Respectfully,



Allen S. Weiss, M.D., President and CEO

P.S. DO YOU HAVE A COLLEAGUE OR FRIEND WHO WOULD BE INTERESTED IN THESE UPDATES?

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