

Vanderbilt Health

STRATEGIES FOR HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



An informational interview with Mary Yarbrough MD, MPH, Executive Director for Health and Wellness, Vanderbilt Health

Interviewed by Chris Clarke and Madison Tandy



Tennessee Hospital Association is gathering best practices and researching innovative methods hospitals are using to take care of their employees, to share among Tennessee facilities and showcase Tennessee hospitals' outstanding work. The Tennessee Center for Patient Safety at THA interviewed Mary Yarbrough, MD, MPH, Executive Director for Health and Wellness at Vanderbilt Health to learn more about Vanderbilt Health well-being initiatives.

Dr. Mary Yarbrough has a background in public health, preventative medicine, and occupational medicine. She started at Vanderbilt as the Director of Occupational Medicine before transitioning to her current role, Executive Director for Health and Wellness.

Dr. Yarbrough shared a few of the strategies employed in Vanderbilt's Occupational Health Clinic, Work/Life Connections EAP (Employee Assistance Program), and Health Plus program for supporting Vanderbilt employee well-being.

The Occupational Health Clinic

The Occupational Health Clinic at VUMC recognized a need to address departments at high risk of ergonomic injuries. An Occupational Health Clinic committee was established to address and decrease injury rates, particularly with EVS, patient transport, and nutrition services. The clinic also pursued COVID-related initiatives to ensure COVID-positive employee needs were met. The clinic:

1. Participates in focused outreach presentations to departments to educate about COVID vaccines
2. Holds departmental Ask Me visits to address concerns and questions surrounding VUMC's comprehensive COVID response
3. Reaches out to positive employees to counsel re: symptoms and return to work
4. Partners with Work/Life Connections EAP for psychological support resources to positive employees
5. Pursued a vaccine initiative (over 70,000 vaccines given so far)

Work/Life Connections Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

The Work/Life Connections EAP mission is “elevating psychological resilience.” Through the program, Vanderbilt has succeeded in the following focus areas:

Mental Health Support

1. Processed 1,479 employee intakes and provided 2,500 follow-up counseling sessions in FY22
2. Facilitated 127 critical incident stress debriefings to provide psychological support in response to challenging workplace events
3. Provided 193 resilience workshops

Support for Financial Stressors

1. Vanderbilt University Medical Center (VUMC) Hardship Fund assists with paying bills or providing emergency food assistance for employees experiencing financial hardship
2. Work/Life Connections program manages a VUMC flex PTO program, allowing employees to donate PTO to other eligible employees with a medical emergency

Leadership Support

1. Developed a Leadership Wellness Toolkit to equip managers with tools to address the impact of occupational burnout
2. Provides a roadmap of questions to ask, format for post-event huddle debriefings, and more for leaders to use with their employees

Clinician Well-Being

Vanderbilt created a physician taskforce in 2017 to focus on physician burnout, recognizing that

stress was building among their providers and faculty. They intentionally focused on the positive and named the taskforce a “well-being” taskforce. The group selected a validated metric to measure occupational burnout and one that could be shared with department leaders. The Mini Z tool, supported through the American Medical Association, was the selected metric and is used to monitor physician occupational well-being as well as to help hold leaders accountable.

Dr. Yarbrough’s advice for other hospitals looking to strengthen their worker well-being programs includes:

1. Ensure managers have the support they need to handle well-being issues and burnout. Teach them appropriate ways to respond to employees.
2. Start team meetings with positivity: “What went well for you today?” Note: It’s okay to receive negative responses.
3. Encourage managers to let people express their thoughts. It is essential to acknowledge what has happened to everybody because of the pandemic. We are all affected.

If you are interested in Dr. Yarbrough’s well-being work, contact her at mary.yarbrough@vumc.org.



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