

Guest Editorial

National Consortium for Building Healthy Academic Communities (BHAC) 2019 National Summit: An Experience to Remember

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Of all conferences, the National Summit for Building Healthy Academic Communities (BHAC) is a favorite. Unless you are working in one of the institutions that already has an established comprehensive wellness program, many of us are fighting the good fight to create a healthier culture in isolation, with limited financial resources, and often without the support from leadership. The summit provides an opportunity for like-minded individuals from diverse disciplines and academic roles to learn about and experience best practices in health promotion and prevention efforts. The Ohio State University, home of BHAC, provided a wonderful venue that truly reflects a culture of wellbeing. Simply put, they walk their talk. Throughout the summit, healthy nutritional options were provided along with several opportunities to participate in physical activity before, during, or after summit sessions. Additionally, dynamic keynote speakers who are the “best of the best” in the field were in attendance. The theme for this year was Building Cultures of Wellbeing with an agenda that featured sessions on culture, wellness, happiness, and health. Upon arrival to the campus, we had the opportunity to tour the university and learn about all the wellness initiatives at The Ohio State University. Being from smaller schools with limited resources, it was exciting to see all of the great resources available to faculty, staff, and students on campus to promote wellbeing. It was particularly fascinating to hear about how intentional the programming is on campus and how they are continually reassessing their offerings to meet the needs of the campus community.

Founder and current president Bernadette Melnyk was the first to create a “chief wellness officer” position and has been a strong leader in researching health and wellness trends across institutions of higher education. She was one of several keynote speakers and presented current research trends and data on the impact of wellness initiatives on faculty, staff and students as well as the impact on institutional savings. Three other keynotes were equally as dynamic and engaging, Kristen Hadeed, Petra Kolber and Ron Goetzel. Kristen Hadeed, founder of Student Maid and author of “Permission to Screw Up”, spoke about the importance of authenticity and working with others to achieve success. Her talk included stories about how she learned to “lead by doing (almost) everything wrong.” Petra Kolber, renowned fitness expert and wellness leader led us through several activities and addressed the current dilemmas facing generation Z. She invited participants to sign up for her 30-day Happiness Habit challenge that was rooted in the science of positive psychology. Ron Goetzel, senior scientist and director of the Institute for Health and Productivity Studies at John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, is considered an expert in evaluating the efficacy of wellness programs. His paper “Do workplace health promotion programs work?” (2014) is prolific and reflects his mastery at critically assessing the merits of wellness initiatives.

The leaders of BHAC, current president Bernadette Melnyk, and recent past president Megan Amaya, should be commended for their leadership in creating a venue that reflects what we all would hope for our own institutions.



The Summit provided ample opportunities to socialize with professionals from other institutions and those in the industry of wellness and health promotion who shared our passion for promoting health and wellness on our campuses. We walked away from the summit encouraged, invigorated, enlightened and hopeful that we could make changes on our campuses that would benefit our whole academic community. It was truly an experience to remember!

REFERENCES

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