

Health Coaches Guide Clients Toward Wellness

Health coaching may be one of the best-kept secrets among healthcare careers.

“The way that we define ‘health coach’ is a healthcare professional who is trained and skilled in helping people intentionally make change - behavior change, belief change - it can be change of just about any kind,” explains Karen Lawson, MD, program director for health coaching at the University of Minnesota Center for Spirituality & Healing (www.csh.umn.edu).

Client-centered, Client-driven

Health coaching is both integrative and holistic. Coaches don’t prescribe, but offer support, resources and guidance, Lawson says.

For example, a health coach may help a patient who’s been told to quit smoking to discern what’s making it difficult to kick the habit. Some patients seek health coaches when a diagnosis leaves them unsure how to proceed; others do it as a preventative strategy.

“It’s not only client-centered but it’s client-driven,” Lawson says. “It’s a quite a bit different than a nurse educator who is relaying information or a case manager who is telling someone what they need to do and when they need to do it.”

Cindy Schultz, a health coach in private practice in St. Paul (www.seekinnerwisdom.com), says many of her clients have chronic health issues that conventional medicine isn’t managing adequately.

“A lot of our physical symptoms are actually a reflection of another part of us being out of balance or out of sync,” explains Schultz, one of the first graduates of the university’s five-year-old program. “When you meet with a physician, they typically don’t explore this.”

The Education Program

The U of MN offers a two-year, post-baccalaureate certificate with two four-day week-ends in class per semester and the rest online or by phone. Students learn mindfulness practices, communication skills, self-awareness and the coaching process.

“It really takes a lot of practice,” Lawson says. “People need to have time to unlearn what they have learned before, time to learn new ways of looking at things.”

Students do peer coaching, then supervised coaching of volunteers before entering internships at one of eight healthcare, corporate or fitness sites around the Twin Cities.

“There is a growing number of opportunities for health coaches in a huge variety of arenas,” says Lawson.

Schultz, who is also a licensed psychologist and energy healer, says health coaching has filled in gaps in terms of what she can offer clients. “Now I am able to really help people take charge of their health situations,” she says. “I have a much clearer picture of what is going on with people.”

— **Nancy Crotti**
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