



Local leaders looking to make, inspire healthy choices

By Michael Dashiell

Wednesday, July 4, 2018 1:30am | [NEWS](#)

“We need to redefine what it means to be healthy, and rethink health.”

Olympic Medical Center CEO Eric Lewis had some perspective to share — both professional and personal — at last week’s Healthy Leaders 5210 Challenge Kick-off Event.

The community could benefit from focusing on health and prevention, Lewis said.

“We can’t keep building facilities and buying equipment,” he said.

Dr. Monica Dixon, Olympic Peninsula Health Care Coalition president, said the event — one that brought together Lewis and 11 other community leaders to highlight the coalition’s 5-2-1-0 health initiative — was the culmination of a dream that started two years ago. She said she was startled to see in a Clallam County health assessment the number of diabetes-related deaths and hospitalizations, figures that overshadowed issues such as the area’s opioid epidemic.

Soon started the coalition’s promotion of “5-2-1-0,” a national public education campaign designed to bring awareness to daily recommendations for nutrition and physical activity.

In short, the campaign encourages community members to increase their intake of fruits and vegetables (to at least five servings per day, cut their recreational screen time (television, cell phones) to two hours or less per day, get at least one hour of moderate to vigorous exercise per day, and eliminate sugar-added drinks such as soda and sweetened coffee drinks.

These four lifestyle behaviors have been found by researchers to be the most powerful steps one can take to prevent chronic diseases such as cancer, heart disease, arthritis and diabetes over the long-term, the coalition noted.

The Olympic Peninsula Health Care Coalition, a county-wide nonprofit working to decrease chronic disease in our region, has promoted 5-2-1-0 for the past two years. The newest program, the Healthy Leaders 5210 Challenge, started when Dixon connected with Lewis, who said he had dropped about 20 pounds using the program.

“My jaw just dropped,” Dixon said. “This is exactly the kind of community champion (we need) to get this going.”

On June 28, Dixon brought the healthy “leaders” together for a dinner and briefing at Olympic Medical Center Seasons Café, as they prepare to follow the 5-2-10 principle for the month of July.

In addition to Lewis, the group includes:

- Nicole Brewer, Parenting Matters Foundation/First Teacher Program Executive Director
- Mary Budke, Olympic Peninsula Boys & Girls Clubs Executive Director
- Jessica Hernandez, Port Angeles Food Bank Executive Director
- Thom Hightower, Olympic Medical Center board commissioner
- Cindy Kelly, Port Angeles School District board director
- Patty Lebowitz, Sequim Free Clinic and Sequim Food Bank board member
- Rebekah Miller, Peninsula Behavioral Health Development Director
- Mark Ozias, Clallam County commissioner
- Tom Sanford, North Olympic Land Trust Executive Director
- Andra Smith, Sequim Food Bank Executive Director
- Jim Stoffer, Sequim School District board director

The goal, Dixon said, is not just to help the community leaders get healthier but for them to spread the message to their staff and within their spheres of influence, helping the community become aware of the importance of healthy lifestyle choices.

“Policy starts with you guys,” Dixon told the group. “As you share this with your colleagues, we’re going to be able to do grow this thing in a big way.”

Dixon said she started studying nutrition because she was obese. She encouraged the community leaders last week to find ways within their hectic days to follow the program, from having food such as nuts available to snack on during the day to walking while taking phone calls.

“It’s going to be very tough because you’re very busy,” she said.

Dixon will bring the group back together at the end of July to see what progress has been made, what new habits were formed and what habits were hardest to break.

“5-2-1-0 is an awesome message and it’s easy to understand,” Dixon said.

“One of the biggest changes I’ve made,” Lewis said, “was going from \$5 coffees ... to black coffee.”

The group peppered Dixon with questions about what constituted healthy choices — sweeteners like agave is bad (taxing on the pancreas and liver), beer has carbohydrates but isn’t terribly harmful, unsweetened iced tea and olive oil are good — while they had a healthy, Mediterranean diet-based meal.

She encouraged the group to write positive, healthy messages on their bathroom mirrors each morning.

“In our heads we need positive affirmations. We know that what goes into our hearts becomes what we do.”

Dixon said the healthy lifestyles not only fight issues such as diabetes, research is showing better diets can fight issues such as anxiety, depression, addiction and opioid use.

“It’s only a beginning; we need to change policy,” Dixon told the group.

“Our work has just begun.”

For more about the Olympic Peninsula Health Care Coalition, see www.healthyop.org.



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