

“There is such diversity in our workforce of 19,000-plus that we walk a delicate tightwire in developing and disseminating health information. We must not bore intellectuals, yet reach employees who are not computer savvy or read well. Our Hope Health Custom newsletter accomplishes this all perfectly.”

— Stacy Kendrick, MS  
Coordinator of Health Promotion,  
Faculty & Staff Health and Wellness

# Successful Employee Communications

*Case study from:*  
**Vanderbilt University**



**HOPE**  
**HEALTH**

# Connection

Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN  
Employee base: 19,000

**T**alk about preaching to the choir; can you imagine the challenge in developing health and wellness information for doctors and nurses? It's not as easy as it sounds to promote health to faculty and staff of a university and medical center.

"People in the health professions are great at taking care of others, but sometimes not as good at finding time to care for themselves," said Stacey Kendrick, MS, Coordinator of Health Promotion, Faculty and Staff Health and Wellness at Vanderbilt University.

Add to the mix the challenge of reaching not only physicians but a highly educated university faculty and the support staff that keeps a giant medical center and its university going, such as landscapers, environmental service technicians, mechanics, and food service workers.

There is such diversity in the workforce of 19,000-plus that Kendrick and her colleagues walk a delicate tightwire in developing and disseminating health information. She must not bore intellectuals, yet she must reach employees who are not able to use a computer or read well.

Vanderbilt University has built a strong reputation as a leader in higher education, research, and health care throughout the Southeast and the nation over the course of its 127-year history. Innovation is driven by its medical and nursing schools as well as research.

Kendrick is charged with editing the health and wellness newsletter as part of her function in the human resources department. The department of Health and Wellness supports faculty and staff in everything from handling work-related injuries to getting health-care workers up-to-date on their immunizations to providing a fully equipped fitness center.



*The Vanderbilt version of a Hope Health custom newsletter reflects the Vanderbilt health messages on every page. Hope Health custom publishing experts work with Stacey Kendrick, MS, and Wellness at Vanderbilt University, and other Health and Wellness staff to create the newsletter six times per year.*

*The eight-pager called Connection is distributed by bulk mail to employees at home because "this is one way we convey health messages to family members of faculty and staff," Kendrick said. "People also have more time at home to read a newsletter, and they tell us they enjoy relaxing with ours," she said. "At work they are focused on work."*

The newsletter bridges all four major areas of Health and Wellness: HEALTH Plus, the Occupational Health Clinic, Work/Life Connections-EAP and the Childcare Center. Each edition is packed with information specific to these programs and is often written by faculty and staff.

Employees are asked to take part in an annual health risk assessment (HRA). Aggregate results help determine areas of concentration in the health and wellness articles as well as in the on-campus programs. Diabetes awareness and management programs grew out of a need discovered through the HRA. The newsletter is a focal point for information on programs.

“We also identify areas employees are interested in and try to always have features on those topics,” said Kendrick. She works with her Hope Health Custom newsletter coordinator to choose fun and light quotes with what she calls “the Hope flair.”

Certainly e-mails are used to alert faculty and staff to upcoming programs. Additionally, once employees complete the HRA and have agreed to be contacted, they may also be asked to participate in lifestyle phone coaching to reduce certain risk factors they may have.

“The newsletter drives employees to the four Health and Wellness Websites where they can navigate to specific information,” said Kendrick. “They also get information in the newsletter to phone a nurse coordinator to register for medically based programs or a staff member for group fitness or other topics.”

Kendrick has buy-in from senior leaders. She has learned that having that support is an important component leading to the success of the wellness program overall and for the newsletter as its anchor communication vehicle.

She and her colleagues actively seek input from an all-employee advisory committee for HEALTH Plus — the wellness component. Designated faculty and staff represent campus-wide employee groups who work at the grassroots level to give ideas for marketing, input on ways to improve programming, and take information back to their staff. The group meets once a quarter. The free lunch assures high attendance.



*The three-color look was entirely customized for Vanderbilt using their school colors of black and gold with a changing highlight color. The front-page banner is branded with the distinctive health&wellness logo. Kendrick said they have moved to the use of photo graphics to create a distinguishing and updated look and feel.*

*Vanderbilt experts assist in writing columns. “Ask the Dietitian” was started by Kendrick in partnership with dietitians in training. Students on rotation write the ongoing column, which is reviewed by a registered dietitian on staff. The occupational health clinic Medical Director writes the Vanderbilt DocTalk column.*

More formal evaluation looks at HRA data to observe changes in the aggregate population, Kendrick said. Vanderbilt can rely on the HRA data because the Health and Wellness team is able to achieve an 80% participation rate, even though filling out the annual data is not required and there is no penalty for not doing so. The reward, however, is well worth the effort, she said. Employees can earn up to \$240 per year with additional financial incentives for spouses and certified domestic partner participation.



*Vanderbilt medical experts review Hope-contributed articles that bolster health areas highlighted in the health risk assessment (a recent series on diabetes is one example of targeted information). Kendrick has Vanderbilt medical experts weave in their own comments to personalize general health information supplied by Hope Health.*

