

Case Study Number 3

Wellness Institute at Seven Oaks General Hospital: Local and Global Partnerships for Chronic Disease Prevention and Management

<http://wellnessinstitute.ca/>

Key Informant:

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“The ultimate goal for us was to leverage the global demand for training, expertise and licensing to have a local impact by supporting our community here in Winnipeg. “

Partners involved: Local partners such as ALCOA, PACM, Canadian Diabetes Association, all Manitoba Regional Health Authorities, service delivery agency partners, Industry Partners, and global partners including Rizhao Hospital in Shandong, China and key partner in the Canada Wellness Institute at Rizhao Hospital, China

Length of partnership: The Wellness Institute began working with local community partners at its inception 20 years ago, formally partnered with all Manitoba RHAs in 2008, and opened China’s first medical fitness facility through a hospital partnership in 2015.

How did the partnership make the initial connections?

For the last 20 years, as a self-supporting medical fitness facility integrated with a community hospital, the Wellness Institute has worked with local partners to serve our community through chronic disease prevention and management services. In fact, the Wellness Institute has formally worked with over 100 community agencies.

Community partnerships have included partnering with the Canadian Diabetes Association to co-host large scale events, have a long-standing partnership with ALCOA-MB for service delivery, and partnering with rural health care providers for the delivery of Get Better Together throughout Manitoba.

While our efforts have always (and will always) focus on serving our local community, we realized that Get Better Together Manitoba was an opportunity for the Wellness Institute to influence and support the health and wellness of communities throughout Manitoba, and that it was possible through partnerships.

Interestingly, in 2014, Seven Oaks Hospital and the Wellness Institute were presented with an opportunity to have a global reach. And that would also be through partnerships.

In a relatively short period Seven Oaks General Hospital has developed strong relationships with several hospitals and healthcare organizations in China. It all started in 2011 when a delegation from Anhui Provincial Hospital was visiting North American hospitals looking for innovative practices. On a side trip to Winnipeg they stopped to see some innovations using RFID tags to track processes in Seven Oaks new Emergency Department.

As part of the tour of Seven Oaks, the delegates visited the Wellness Institute, and began to ask questions about how to implement similar hospital-integrated chronic disease prevention and management programs. That led to invitations for Seven Oaks to present at national conferences in China, more visits by Chinese Hospitals to Winnipeg and a training and cooperation agreement with the China Hospital Association, which led to an agreement with the Rizhao City Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine to jointly develop a world class facility in that coastal city.

The Rizhao City Development Corporation contributed a former athletes reception centre originally built for the 2008 Olympics (approximately 110,000 square feet) the Hospital contributed staff to get the project started and the facility was built based using the Wellness Institute model with our management support and training.

Partnerships can present themselves in many forms and sometimes it takes openness, and a willingness to accept risk to see the opportunity and take on the challenge. In this case the challenge was embraced and the culture of innovation within the Wellness Institute and Seven Oaks Hospital supported a trial of its model in a global market.

How did the partnership foster shared understanding? Create a shared vision?

A cross-cultural partnership can be demanding because in any partnership learning each other's perspective and communicating effectively is the basis for success. Communicating through interpreters, often long distance, and across an historic cultural divide is a huge challenge but also a huge opportunity for learning.

Our partnership benefitted from traditional Chinese emphasis on relationship building in business, where the partnership relationship itself is more important than the signed agreement. We learned about each other, and found points of common understanding including:

- Two publicly-funded hospitals open to innovation and entrepreneurship
- A common interest in addressing the burden of chronic disease on our health systems
- An understanding of bureaucratic impediments to change
- Respect for the individual strengths of the partners, culturally and organizationally
- A shared belief that ideas can come from small organizations and cities

All parties were transparent in sharing their goals. Rizhao Hospital was looking for ways to implement an evidence-based model for integrating lifestyle medicine with traditional hospital services. It wanted to lead the country by opening the first facility of this kind and differentiate itself from other hospitals in China.

Rizhao City Development Corporation's goal is to raise the profile of Rizhao City as an innovative and progressive city and tourism destination for northern China.

Wellness Institute's goal was to develop an international revenue stream that can be used to support research, development, facilities and patient care at Seven Oaks Hospital including the Wellness Institute, while introducing evidence-informed chronic disease management practices in China.

Canada Wellness Institute at Rizhao delivers services to local citizens but it is also a hub where Canadian experts can provide training for healthcare providers in China. It's also a demonstration site for Seven Oaks to showcase its potential for the rest of China, including large hospitals in Beijing and other major cities, national health associations and the government of China.

That success in one smaller coastal city is leading to opportunity all across China.

What have we learned as a result of this partnership?

We have learned to embrace the unknown!

Seven Oaks leaders travelled to China as invited guests for keynote presentations not knowing what opportunities might be ahead. We were prepared to take the risk that our efforts to collaborate might have little reward, and to build relationships until we found the right partners.

Successful partnerships must recognize and value each other's practices even its outside of the partnership framework. For example, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is integrated in all health care in China and a trusted practice by Chinese health care consumers. Although the Wellness Institute offers services like massage, chiropractic and acupuncture that are similar we don't have expertise in TCM and had to trust our partner in order to integrate TCM with our model.

Working with Chinese Hospitals means working with the Chinese government so that also meant developing a strong working relationship with Manitoba Growth, Enterprise and Trade, Global Affairs Canada and the Canadian Embassy for advice, direction government acceptance in China. We also developed closer relationships with businesses and associations in Manitoba involved with trade to China, and the Canada China Business Council, and we enlisted the support of local Chinese Canadian organizations, and Chinese students at the University of Manitoba to assist with hosting delegates from China.

Our global partnerships have presented opportunities to improve and enhance our current capabilities in Winnipeg. As a hospital, it has challenged us to advance our clinical integration to ensure it met international standards for coordinated health care.

Take away message:

This partnership is unique and doesn't suggest that every organization should look for similar partnerships. What we hope it demonstrates is the possibilities of non-traditional partnerships and how they may arise without necessarily looking for it.

"Successful partnerships are built on innovation and the drive to question, challenge, and disrupt current philosophies, practices and assumptions."