

Minutes of the Human Resources and University Relations Committee
University of Kentucky Board of Trustees
Tuesday, December 15, 2020

The Human Resources and University Relations Committee of the University of Kentucky Board of Trustees met on Tuesday, December 15, 2020, via Zoom Webinar.

A. Meeting Opened

Sandy Shuffett, chair of the Human Resources and University Relations Committee, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

Chair Shuffett asked Sarah Orr to announce the attendance.

B. Roll Call

The following members of the Committee were in attendance: Cathy A. Black, Lee X. Blonder, David Melanson, Paula Pope, and Bryan Sunderland.

Other Board members present included: Joe R. Bowen, Michael Christian, Raymond Daniels, Kimberly McCann, Elizabeth McCoy, Derrick K. Ramsey, Hollie Swanson, Robert Vance, Rachel Watts Webb and Barbara Young.

C. Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Trustee Melanson to approve the minutes from the Thursday, June 18, 2020 Committee meeting. The motion was seconded by Trustee Blonder. The motion was carried, and the minutes were approved as written.

D. Mental Health Support for Employees

Chair Shuffett introduced Vice President and Chief Human Resources officer Kim Wilson to introduce Employee Engagement and Work-life Director, Ericka Chambers.

Dr. Chambers thanked the Board of Trustees for allowing her to present on the topic of mental health support and continued by describing the potential mental health challenges during the pandemic. "While a vaccine has signaled hope, some psychologists are talking about a pandemic fourth wave, the longer-term mental health effects, and mental illness that many will live with even after we return to normalcy."

Dr. Chambers continued by describing the mental health support the university provides to employees. "Currently, there are many long-standing workgroups and faculty committees discussing mental health and well-being within their college or division. Trustee Blonder serves on a faculty committee within the College of Medicine. The focus is physician burnout as well as stress and anxiety in the workplace."

Dr. Chambers highlighted the four specific resources and services that the university supports:

1. UK HealthCare Psychiatry
2. Team Blue Clinic
3. LiveHealth Online
4. Work+Life Connections Employee Counseling

UK HealthCare Psychiatry serves both employees and the community by providing individual and group psychotherapy and family therapy. They offer both an inpatient unit and outpatient clinic with specialties in anxiety disorders and depression, personality disorders and schizophrenia. This past spring, Psychiatry developed a program called Reaching out to Employees with Stress Reduction and Behavioral Health Treatment (REST), which provides UK healthcare employees with a range of stress reduction, coping skills and behavioral resources while working on the frontlines of the pandemic.

UK HealthCare also has several clinics that provide behavioral health for the community and employees. Dr. Chambers highlighted the Team Blue Clinic which serves members of UK Health Plans. They specialize in primary care, wellness and prevention and very recently added behavioral health appointments via a Mental Health Nurse Practitioner. "Similar to UK HealthCare Psychiatry, this is a great option for employees who manage their mental health or a mental illness with medication."

LiveHealth Online is provided through the UK HealthPlan and offers 24/7 telehealth access to a therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist regardless of an employee's home or work location. "This has been a great option for employees who are working remotely, outside of Kentucky and those who prefer weekend or late evening appointments."

All three of these resources have a co-pay with each visit. However, during the pandemic, UK has waived the co-pay for all telemedicine services through January 21, 2021, with plans to continue no copays for services via LiveHealth Online and UK HealthCare telecare after that.

The Work+Life Connections office ensures employees, and their family members have access to mental-health care with a licensed or certified professional by offering short-term therapy at no cost to employees. In addition to individual therapy, the office provides mental health screenings, assessments, and referrals to community-based resources, when needed.

The employee counseling offices located in Breckinridge Hall on campus, but they quickly transitioned to telehealth services in March and continue to offer telehealth appointments today.

Dr. Chambers noted the on-campus counseling center focused on employees does not get enough attention. Explaining a lot of organizations outsource mental health and well-being support to an Employee Assistance Program. In the last two years, there

has been a shift in thinking and organizations, like Google, are being applauded for offering such groundbreaking benefits as on-site or in-house therapy services.

“Supporting employee mental health is neither new nor groundbreaking at the University of Kentucky. The university has provided this service for over 30 years. Before establishing the Work+Life Connections office, UK Human Resources (HR) worked for approximately 20 years with the UK Department of Family Sciences and their REFER, a mental health benefit offered by the UK Family Center clinic.”

When the Work+Life office was established in 2009, there was one mental health counselor, Ann Bassoni, who is still on staff at Work+Life Connections today. Ms. Bassoni can tell you that in those early years it was sometimes difficult to get employees to talk about mental health or seek out therapy. She often tells the story of standing on campus with a stack of flyers and shouting to any employee who passed by, “You need therapy! Everyone needs therapy,” and then handing them a flyer.

The demand for therapy grew. In 2016, an additional therapist was hired and last year Work+Life Connections office added two more therapists to the team. Work+Life Connections office is also in the process of expanding these services through a partnership with the College of Social Work. With the support of Dean Jay Miller, this partnership allows the office to further support Black employees seeking healing from racial trauma.

Dr. Chambers shared a line graph that illustrated the total number of therapy sessions by month in 2019 and 2020.

After hiring the additional therapist in August 2019, the line graph shows that the Work+Life Connections office was able to increase the number of sessions each month and expected these increased volume levels to continue through 2020. What they experienced was a decrease in the number of sessions beginning in March, due to the coronavirus, and a continued drop through May.

Immediately, they moved to telehealth sessions and a few things occurred. Many UK employees were, almost overnight, working remotely, K-12 schools also went virtual and childcare centers closed. Clients were cancelling appointments because they were adjusting to this new way of teaching, working and trying to manage their child’s virtual learning. Some felt like the issue they were seeing a therapist for prior to the pandemic was no longer as relevant. Others reported they no longer had time for a 50-minute therapy session.

Other clients cancelled because of the lack of privacy at home. This remains a concern for employees, but clients have gotten very creative. There are a lot of virtual therapy sessions that take place in closets, their garage, in the car in their driveway, and parking lot of a grocery store.

Prior to March 2020, the therapists were working with people on issues related to anxiety and depression or concerns about different relationship issues at home or work. During the early days of the pandemic, the intensity of these issues increased but employees were also reporting new difficulties.

Many of the clients the therapists now work with are grieving – grieving the loss of experiences, isolation from friends and coworkers, loss of their routine, death of a loved one, and having little to no contact with family – especially elders who are in senior living facilities.

Many parents they see are feeling anxious about their ability to fulfill all their roles while working remotely and concerns about their children not getting the education or socialization that is critical to their growth and development.

There has also been an increase in the number of clients who are engaging in therapy for the first time. Some will say they are “feeling off” but don’t know why or they do not know how to identify what they are experiencing as anxiousness or depression.

The therapists are also hearing even more clients talk about conflict at home and substance use due to the coping skills they previously relied on – such as socializing with friends, and daily routines – no longer being available.

“While individual therapy is a great option for many employees, the office of Work+Life Connections knows it is not for everyone.” Dr. Chamber mentions that there is power in a group of people coming together around a shared experience or topic. Supervisors are recognizing this, too.

The Work+Life Connections office has seen an increase in the number of supervisors and leaders seeking support for their team or department. These supervisors and teams are asking us to go beyond the 15-minute presentation we used to provide about services available. Instead, they are asking us to go in-depth with their team about stress management, self-care practices or resiliency.

Dr. Chambers mentioned topics and presentation titles the therapists and members of the HR well-being team have provided to groups across campus over the past several months. One example was Staff Senate Chair Jon Gent inviting the Work+Life Connections team to speak at the Staff Senate meeting about stress, mindfulness and self-compassion. “A year ago, these topics may have been offered during well-being week or a one-time presentation in the fall. Those who attended were very familiar with our services and caring for their mental health.”

Dr. Chambers pointed out that in 2020 the Work+Life Connections team has provided over 90 presentations or programs. The attendees have ranged from those who are brand new to conversations about mental health to those who have their therapist on speed-dial.

In the spring, the Work+Life and Well-Being teams quickly adapted their programming to a virtual environment and developed additional resources to meet the changing needs of our employees. They created videos on demand to offer information about mental health topics that employees can access anytime and anywhere. Additionally, the Wildly Resilient podcast which was created for employees who may not have the time to attend an event or prefer an audio format. Each episode features conversations with experts from the university community on a variety of well-being topics.

Dr. Chambers continued by highlighting two of the virtual events- The Holiday Well-Being Campaign and the Midday Mingle. The Holiday Well-Being Campaign featured podcasts, videos and articles to offer practical support for those who may feel stressed, overwhelmed, depressed, anxious, lonely or disconnected over the holidays. These resources were promoted through internal communications and postcards to the employee's homes encouraging them to reach out for support and utilize these resources in the coming weeks.

The other event highlighted was Midday Mingle. The Work+Life therapists created this program in the spring to address concerns with loneliness and isolation. This one-hour virtual event is offered twice a week. There is no agenda, topic or guest speakers. They talk about everything from the good takeout they got the night before to an alligator in Florida that looked like a dinosaur. It is meant to help people connect and has been very successful. Some attendees have told the therapists "this series has been a lifesaver" for them. Others have said they were newer to Kentucky or UK and had difficulty making friends, but they have been able to make friends through these events.

An outcome HR did not anticipate is how popular these events have been with employees who have always worked remotely or those in the extension offices across Kentucky. They are telling HR that this virtual format has helped them feel better connected to the university campus and they can meet and connect with colleagues in a way they couldn't have before.

HR expects long-after the university returns to an in-person work environment, they will continue offering virtual events and on-demand resources to better help UK's employees stay connected regardless of location.

The Well-Being team is made up of several different HR departments – including the therapists in Work+Life Connections—that come together for a shared goal of supporting and improving employee wellbeing. The Well-Being team takes a holistic view of well-being – one that supports the whole self – because they know that mental health is influenced by and can have an influence on other areas of our life. The Well-Being team does not want to wait until someone's mental health becomes an issue. They want to offer resources and services that can provide preventative support.

HR Work-Life offers several programs for caregivers, but the UK working parents' network has helped many employees these past several months, knowing they are not

alone and have a place to seek advice on things like keeping their child motivated in a virtual learning environment.

The same is true with eldercare. A recent Center for Disease Control survey found that those caring for an elder adult during the pandemic had a higher reported incidence of adverse mental and behavioral health conditions compared with others. The office of UK Elder Care helps employees find the caregiving resources they need whether locally or internationally, but they also host a caregiver support group each month to give employees space and time to focus on their own mental health needs.

Another program area is the Health and Wellness team which is focused on supporting physical health. They operate the on-campus Move Well gym for employees. When gyms closed, they began offering a virtual membership with both live and on-demand virtual classes offering exercises adapted to what employees had access to at home. They also offer exercise training specialists to help employees design their own workout based on their changing needs and limited time.

Additionally, HR is supporting financial well-being through a variety of personal finance tools; including Enrich, which is a tool that guides employees through a behavioral assessment to help them understand the why behind their money decisions and can help with things like creating a budget, tracking retirement savings and learning strategies to pay down credit cards. Employees also have access to a financial counselor for more personalized support and expert guidance. For employees who are experiencing a personal financial crisis or hardship, the university helps through the COVID-19 Response Fund or CRISIS fund.

Dr. Chambers discussed aspect of well-being that is often overlooked in the workplace climate. People spend a lot of their lives working. The highs and lows of the workday can spill over into how we interact with family and friends. With this in mind, the university conducts an employee engagement survey – annually at UK HealthCare and every other year on campus—to better understand workplace climate and address concerns. Dr Chambers continued “We also want employees to have the skills they need to succeed in their work or as a leader, so we offer training and professional development opportunities.”

She offered an example of this support with UK HealthCare’s Enterprise Learning. In April, they provided healthcare leaders with an Emotional State toolkit, which contained information and help with emotion recognition and responding to trauma within their teams. They also continue to provide training, 1:1 coaching as well as workshops on energy management and building resilience.

Dr. Chambers stated, “While there are many services, programs and opportunities currently available to support well-being, HR is continuously working to better understand UK’s employee concerns and anticipate needs.”

At the direction of President Capilouto, HR and the Office for Faculty Advancement met with academic leaders to understand the challenges their faculty and staff have faced this year. Themes from those conversations were then shared with groups across campus to identify and rank the five opportunities UK should pursue. Dr. Chambers highlighted the top five that emerged across their collective input.

- Childcare – There are many programs offered through Work+Life. Employees, who are parents, are trying to manage multiple roles – parent, teacher, faculty, staff member – throughout the day. HR is continuing to assess these needs and will focus on how they continue to support and offer services.
- Communication – The pandemic brought much uncertainty to everyone’s lives. In addition to the frequent and transparent communications that have helped curb this uncertainty, what are additional communication strategies the university can implement going forward?
- Flexibility and autonomy in performing work – President Capilouto has often reiterated in his emails and videos a message from UK’s Playbook for Reinvented Operations: “That our work must continue, and our leaders should continue providing flexibility, and extending grace and understanding, to our employees.”
- Benefits, specifically vacation leave and retirement contributions – While the university remains focused on restoring the full retirement match contribution, there were specific challenges with unused vacation leave. In addition to encouraging flexibility and enabling employees to utilize their leave, could the university offer the ability to roll over unused vacation days into the next fiscal year?
- Shared workplace experience in a remote work environment – During the conversations with academic leaders, HR heard many creative ways leaders are keeping their teams connected and engaged while working remotely. The president has asked several leaders to collect and share these best practices and ideas so, as a community, the campus can learn from each other and implement within our own teams.

Dr. Chambers concluded her presentation by thanking the Board of Trustees for the opportunity to talk about some of the mental health support available for UK faculty and staff. She reiterated the continued work of committees across campus and how they are seeking more ways to help with mental health issues.

Chair Shuffett opened the floor for questions.

Trustee Melanson applauded Dr. Chambers and her team for their efforts across campus and colleagues have contacted him about being thankful for the HR team.

Trustee Swanson echoed Trustee Melanson's appreciation and asked what demographics are most in need of Work+Life Connections services?

Dr. Chambers replied that staff members are the largest demographics. She offered to pull additional demographic data and would follow up with Trustee Swanson.

Chair Shuffett again thanked Dr. Chambers and asked if there was any further business to come before the Committee. Seeing none, the meeting was adjourned at 9:26 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Orr