

FIND YOUR FLOW AT THE



Wellness Center

By Christine Steele

The academic requirements for those entering the health professions are rigorous and demanding. Studying to enter these fields requires laser sharp focus and attention to detail. The MUSC Wellness Center offers students entering these professions opportunities to stay focused and meet those demands by helping them lay the foundation for their careers.

But the Wellness Center isn't just a place for physical activity where students can work up a sweat between classes. It takes a holistic approach to wellness, providing students resources to support their emotional, social, spiritual and even financial well-being.

"Building awareness that wellness is multidimensional and interconnected provides a framework for our students' personal and professional development," said Kevin Smuniewski M.Ed.,

director of student wellness programs at the MUSC Wellness Center. "There's no one size fits all approach to maintaining and enhancing one's well-being, so we categorize our programs, services and resources and allow our students to create their own personalized plan à la carte style. They can look through the many opportunities and ask themselves: 'What do I want to learn? What do I want to focus on? What do I want to improve on?'"

"Every program's academic workload here is intense," said Smuniewski, "and the timeline by which students are required to learn everything can create a challenge for them to balance and manage their self-care. We intentionally tailor our tools and resources to take into consideration our students' time constraints. It is imperative for them to find this balance. The responsibilities they will one day face will affect the quality of their patients' lives;



*Student team competitions
on the rooftop sports deck.*

they might have to make a split-second decision that will lead to an outcome of life or death. It is our job to best prepare them for the effects of these demanding careers."

Students need to adopt lifestyles and outlets that allow them to manage stress, re-energize and avoid burnout. With what the facility offers, participation in physical activity is the premier way to achieve this. Multiple studies show the benefits of physical activity on academic performance, cognitive function, physical capacity and self-esteem. It is also shown to decrease chronic disease, anxiety and stress.

Hunter Patterson, a student in the doctor of physical therapy program, said working out at the Wellness Center helps him unwind from a day of classes or clinical rotations and improves his mental and physical health.

"They recently renovated the free weight room, improving the overall accessibility and quality of the space," he said. "It allows me to customize my workouts in infinite ways because of the equipment offered."

Third-year DPT student Shawn Franklin said prior to arriving at MUSC, he had always been a runner and focused more on cardio.

"I knew the benefits of strength training. However, I was living in an area where it was easier just to run from my place rather than take a 15-minute drive to the gym," said Franklin. "My first year, it took me a little while to get into the habit of going to the gym, but, once I did, I was hooked again. The location is close to our buildings for class, and this allowed my classmates and me to work out in between classes or during our breaks."

The pandemic was difficult for everyone, suddenly having everything closed without much warning, Franklin said.

"This really impacted my exercise schedule, because I had previously gotten into a good routine of making it to the gym a few times a week to lift in the weight room and then a couple of days making it to the 6 a.m. spin class. These were ways for me to decompress and get rid of the stresses from the day or clear my mind for the day ahead. I have always found that exercise improves my mood and helps improve my focus, and now I needed

to adjust due to the pandemic. I think the pandemic, in general, was a very good example of the importance of having this exercise outlet because, even with running, I felt that I was going stir crazy. Once the Wellness Center opened back up, I found that I

spent a lot of time there. The gym became a place I could once again clear my head and regain the focus I needed as our classes were now completely online."

Both students also said they really enjoyed participating in intramural sports through the Wellness Center. In addition to feeding their competitive

drive, it helped them get to know students from other colleges and build friendships and camaraderie.

"In addition to the physical, mental and psychological benefits exercise offers me, the Wellness Center is also a place where I can use the tools I am learning in class and try them out on myself," said Franklin. "Studying to become a PT involves learning and being able to instruct people on how to do exercises, so what better way to practice than trying them out myself? I found that I was able to look at the weight room in a different way, and, by trying out

different exercises, I was learning what exercises target which muscles."

"The Wellness Center really provides us students every opportunity to have a good quality gym close to us on campus," said Franklin. "As a future physical therapist, I know the benefits of physical exercise, and, in addition to enjoying exercise, it would be hypocritical if I was to get patients to buy in to exercise if I didn't exercise myself. The gym on campus really helped facilitate an inviting environment that allowed me to feel comfortable, which sometimes isn't the case at other gyms."

Franklin's viewpoint is aligned with the research that suggests the health and well-being of health care providers matter, and their habits can have a positive effect on the patients and populations they serve. Providers are constantly asked for advice from their patients; what better way is there to make a meaningful point than to share a personal story of success? ♦



Intramural basketball in the multi-purpose gym.



Intramural flag football team champions