

PROFILES IN EXCELLENCE: Karen Blanchard

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.
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If someone works in the healthcare industry, it is widely known that there is a risk of infection.

For the staff and patients of North Point Health & Wellness Center, 1313 Penn Ave. N., the "infection" that is going around is enthusiasm, and Patient Zero for this pathogen is registered dietitian, Karen Blanchard. The ball of energy and enthusiasm that is Blanchard is doing everything in her power to educate and reeducate the area's residents on healthy eating and more importantly, how to live a healthy lifestyle. The registered dietitian is a catalyst for the Insight News' Insight-2-Health Challenge. Insight-2-Health is a challenging and fun fitness and lifestyle initiative designed to promote measurable and long-lasting health and fitness outcomes for program participants.

"I love what I do. I have a passion for talking about nutrition and weight management," said Blanchard, who grew up on a farm in Arkansas and is a graduate of the University of Arkansas Pine Bluff, where she attended on scholarship.

Blanchard came to the Twin Cities when she accepted a position with General Mills working in one of the company's test kitchens. Prior to joining General Mills, Blanchard was a commissioned officer in the military and served as assistant nutritionist for the state of Missouri. The effervescent dietitian joined the staff of North Point in 2005, where she counsels families on healthy eating and proper nutrition.

When it comes to healthy eating, Blanchard said it is not necessarily what people eat, but how people eat.

"People think they have to sacrifice taste to eat healthy," said Blanchard, who also counsels for the area chapter of the American Diabetes Association. "You can have fried chicken, just not with all that grease. You can have macaroni and cheese, just decrease the cheese and fat a bit. And where's the vegetable? People will have fried chicken and mac and cheese and the vegetable is missing."

The nutritionist, who has conducted healthy cooking demonstrations on television's KARE 11 and at the Minnesota State Fair, said understanding alternative seasoning methods could offer

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healthier meals. She suggested using spices such as cinnamon and Italian seasoning rather than table salt.

"These two don't have sodium," said Blanchard, who recognizes many of her patients suffer from, or are predisposed to, high blood pressure. "We can season our food without a lot of salt. We just need to learn how to prepare food differently – that and portion controls are key."

The Insight-2-Health fitness campaign is addressing the obesity epidemic in Twin Cities African-American community via a "Biggest Loser" style competition of family and community teams working to lose weight and improve fitness over a 10-week period. Certified fitness instructors are leading these teams toward fitness and weight-loss goals. The challenge seeks to achieve weight loss and fitness improvement for participants, create a robust community-wide conversation about obesity, weight loss and fitness that will change perceptions about obesity and encourage people to act now to improve health.

According to Blanchard, achieving optimal health and wellness does not happen in a day.

"It's a journey," said Blanchard. "When we realize who we are now, it took us a long time to become that person, so to get to become and know the new person we want to become, we've got to do it gradually. It's a lifestyle change; it's a commitment. You've got to take it one day at a time. It's not about weight loss; it's about weight management. We get caught up in the dieting, but it's not just about that. It's about being active and enjoying your activity."