

# North Colorado Family Medicine offers lifestyle medicine program

**It takes a village: Combat chronic disease through behavior change and group visits**

More than 80% of chronic disease and 40% of cancers can be attributed to diet and lifestyle. We've all heard it before "eat less and exercise more." But 30 years of worsening trends in obesity and chronic disease have shown that approaching the problem with this simple advice is not helping and may even be hurting patients.

Two board-certified lifestyle medicine providers at Banner Health's North Colorado Family Medicine are on a mission to change how we educate and support patients through facilitated group visits. Lynn Stiff, MD, RD, MS and Alexandra Lessem, DNP, FNP are passionate about helping empower patients to make lasting change in their lives. While this can be done during the brief 10-15 minute interactions in a provider's office, they feel the most powerful change happens when patients have support and connection with other members in a group setting.

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Currently, group visits are minimally reimbursed by insurance companies and can be challenging to create from scratch. Formal programs can be cost-prohibitive to implement. To address this program, the providers turned to The Weld Trust for funding to create their own Lifestyle Medicine Patient Program.

The program is 10 weeks long with weekly videos to watch, homework to complete and a group meeting to attend. The group visits include a facilitator (lifestyle medicine trained counselor or dietitian) and a physician or family nurse practitioner certified in lifestyle medicine. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the pilot program funded by The Weld Trust moved online. This small group format allows for each participant to speak and connect authentically with others who are going through similar situations and struggles.

During a recent group meeting, participants were asked to write a few words about what this group has meant to them. The theme was clear – motivation, connection, support. All are necessary for most individuals to implement lasting change in their lives. Participants have taken a deep dive into why they eat what they eat, learned to set SMART goals about health behaviors, cooked a plant-based meal, practiced stress relieving techniques, and so much more.

"The goal of the program is for participants to gain the depth of knowledge and personal insight required to implement and sustain behavior change for optimal health," said co-creator, Dr. Stiff. "People often think behavior change is simple and are filled with shame and disappointment when they aren't successful. The truth is, behavior change is hard. Really hard. That is why we see chronic diseases rising despite valid efforts from the medical community to address these diseases. No pill can fix this epidemic. Only we can fix it. It starts with the person who decides to make an intentional effort to go against the default in our society and live a healthier life. Then it grows with support, education and perseverance which can be nurtured through a program like the one we've created."

The Lifestyle Medicine Patient Program will finish at the end of March. The providers look forward to sharing the results of the post-participation survey and working toward ways to spread this program across Weld County. While they will continue to offer the medically facilitated program through their clinic, they also plan to offer the weekly videos at no cost to Weld County organizations who wish to facilitate their own group program.

To learn more about the Lifestyle Medicine Patient Program, please email the creators at [lifestylemedicinenco@gmail.com](mailto:lifestylemedicinenco@gmail.com).

To learn more about lifestyle medicine, visit: <https://www.lifestylemedicine.org/>.

To take the first step and dive into the world of lifestyle medicine, join the free spring educational program, Lifestyle Medicine 101, which begins April 7: Information can be found at <https://www.subscribe.com/lmevent2021>.

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