

News and Notes

Linking Health & Wealth

HEALTHIER HAMPTON ROADS STRIVES TO IMPROVE HEALTH LITERACY IN COASTAL VIRGINIA, WITH THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF GROWING JOB OPPORTUNITIES

By Kristen De Deyn Kirk

As president and CEO of Reinvent Hampton Roads, Jim Spore focuses on the quantity and the quality of jobs in Coastal Virginia. One of his top goals: Make “CoVa” synonymous with “healthy.”

“We all know healthcare costs are skyrocketing. We want to help businesses control that,” Spore shares. “Plus, a healthier workforce can mean a more productive workforce.”

To support his goal, Spore is working with Virginia Beach company EdLogics and its founder, Thomas Chamberlain, and Healthier Hampton Roads, a new public health literacy initiative.

Spore learned about EdLogics, a software as a service (SaaS) company, four years ago. Chamberlain started the company in 2012, coming out of semi-retirement at the time as his daughter graduated with an MBA and wished to join forces. The idea for a service to boost health literacy hit Chamberlain, who earned a doctor of pharmacy degree years ago.

“When I worked as a pharmacist, I saw people not understanding their health,” he says. “I could give them a brochure. It had information, but not much. I didn’t know if they learned.”

Some might have glanced at the brochure once. Most probably threw it away. What the patients needed was a source that allowed them to first explore the basics of their health condition, later review more detailed information and then also read other health tips. An incentive—beyond good health—to do such research could improve patient engagement, too.

Not many people knew about SaaS back in the days when Chamberlain was working as a pharmacist. Chamberlain, though, was

making the connection between information, technology and better health. He later recognized the full potential of improving people’s lives with the right health education delivered through an easy-to-access, interactive platform, with an element of fun attached through games-based learning and a reward system. After a long career serving in several leadership positions in health-related fields, Chamberlain saw the timing as right for EdLogics.

“I’m a clinician on a mission,” he says with a laugh. “There are online sources like WebMD, but they’re not interactive or incentivized.”

Former Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson, who served as U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services for President George W. Bush, came on as chairman of the company. Chamberlain and his staff developed the software.

They first targeted organizations that self-insure their employees. With better-educated employees, health costs can be lower. An employer purchases the software, introduces it to employees and offers rewards to those who use it. EdLogics can provide data on overall employee engagement and popular topics so that an employer can further educate if they choose. They can also tailor information on health insurance to match the employer’s plan.

Allegheny County Schools, Miami University of Ohio, Anthem, Cigna, UnitedHealthcare, Old Dominion University and Port of Virginia are among EdLogics’ clients.

Before choosing the platform, Virginia-headquartered TowneBank did its research. Health and wellness officer Christy Rudisill, a nurse, was skeptical. Could any platform meet her high standards for

health education? Fortunately, she found that EdLogics’ games and tips deliver current, medically supported information.

“It’s presented in an appealing, well-organized, fun and engaging way,” she says. “It was a resource we could offer to all employees—not just those enrolled in our health plan or working at a specific location. It was also easy to implement and required minimal administrative time on our end.”

Whether an employee is taking a quiz or reading about a condition, he’ll find EdLogics easy to understand: All material is written at a third-grade level.

Forty-five percent of TowneBank employees are registered to use EdLogics, and they average 4,000 logins a month. The bank holds a drawing for participants every month and gives away \$100 to three employees. Chances of winning increase the more an employee uses the platform.

Chamberlain envisions the high engagement and the tempting rewards extending to all Coastal Virginians soon. EdLogics’ user satisfaction statistics give hope that an expansion to the public can improve overall health literacy:

- 77% say the information presented was very informative.
- 75% say information presented covers topics they did not know about previously.
- 73% say they plan to use other resources on EdLogics to learn more about specific conditions.
- 81% of users say they will change their behavior based on the information presented.

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Why a Healthy Workforce Matters

79%

of businesses cite a healthy workforce as a key factor in guiding a new location choice.

98%

of businesses say that a location with a population with high rates of chronic conditions would prevent them from building new facilities.

Patients with low health literacy cost up to **\$8,000 more** per year than patients with high health literacy. Low-literacy patients average a cost of \$10,688 a year and high-literacy patients \$2,891.

An unhealthy employee costs a company about **three times** what a healthy employee does.

Only **3%** of the federal health budget is spent on public health measures. Local municipalities must carry the weight.

Sources: The Council for Adults and Experimental Learning; American Medical Association; Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health

Partnering for Public Health

In June 2019, Chamberlain, Reinvent Hampton Roads' Spore and leaders at Old Dominion University hosted the Hampton Roads Health Literacy Community Leadership Forum. The 100 local business and health experts attending learned the grim facts:

- The cost of low health literacy to the U.S. economy is as high as \$238 billion annually.
- Patients with poor health literacy are more likely to visit an ER; have more hospital stays; adhere less to treatment plans; and have higher death rates.

The forum participants also saw that health literacy in Virginia varies greatly. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill studied Virginians' literacy and coded communities by stoplight colors from dark green to signify proficient to red to indicate below basic literacy. Coastal Virginia

is pocked with yellowish-green (intermediate literacy), orange (basic literacy) and red communities, indicating there's lots of room for improvement. The communities in Northern Virginia are mostly the desired dark green. A business looking to expand or relocate—and concerned with overall employee cost and productivity—would easily notice the difference.

So what can be done to turn all of CoVa green—in hopes of improving health, lowering medical costs and attracting more and high-paying jobs? Forum participants brainstormed ideas and formed alliances. A Healthier Hampton Roads Advisory Board now includes representatives from Sentara Healthcare, Urban League, TST Construction, Norfolk State University, Allfirst, Volunteer Hampton Roads, Access Partnership, Chesapeake Public Library, Global Action Platform and the Forum coordinators—EdLogics, Reinvent Hampton Roads and Old Dominion University.

Their vision for the first health literacy initiative of its kind in the country: “a multi-stakeholder, integrated community-

based program that bridges the worksite and the community, connecting Hampton Roads through an interactive digital health platform which provides a vehicle for increasing awareness, communication, education, engagement and behavior change.”

Amanda Jackson, library director for Chesapeake Public Library, knew immediately that she wanted to be involved.

“Libraries are a natural destination for people experiencing health issues,” she says. “Anyone who has dealt with a health concern knows how overwhelming it can be to find information. We provide that access point to the reliable information.”

Jackson has met with other libraries to discuss ideas for involvement. With funding from philanthropists and corporations, the libraries can become a destination where the EdLogics platform—using the name RewardsForHealthyLiving.com—is offered for free with free WiFi. (A mobile app could be available, too.) They could award incentive points when visiting the library to access the platform, promote other library health resources and hold health-promotion events.

“These are just a few of the ideas we've floated,” says Jackson.

Chamberlain aims to launch Healthier Hampton Roads in early 2020. Nashville, Tenn., the home of partner Global Action Platform, a university-business alliance improving food security, prosperity and health literacy, could be the next site.

“Early on, we purchased URLs for ‘Healthier’ with many city names,” Chamberlain shares. “We see this as scalable in any location.” **CoVaBIZ**

Patients forget up to

80%

of what their doctors told them in the office before they reach the parking lot.

90 million

Americans are at risk for preventable health problems because they don't understand health information.

41%

of Americans have at least one chronic condition. Treating these conditions accounts for 86% of total healthcare costs.

Unhealthy and Uninformed—
and Paying the Price

Source:
Healthier Hampton Roads webinar “Building Healthy Communities Through Improved Health Literacy,” October 2019