



THE HEART OF GRINNELL:

A Community-Wide Wellness Initiative to Transform Stress and Transform Lives

The third in a series of articles by HeartMath CEO BRUCE CRYER, this piece describes a visionary project for transforming stress while enhancing health and well-being in the community of Grinnell, Iowa.



Community health studies like the Framingham and Roseto studies have provided insight into a community’s health and well-being. Because these were observational studies, they did not offer intervention. That is about to change with the launching of the Heart of Grinnell, which could become a template for communities across the United States and around the world.

Coherence matters as much to healthcare professionals as it does to manufacturing employees, police and emergency workers, teachers and their students, a church congregation and its pastor, and athletic teams.

COHERENT COLLABORATION IS KEY

GRMC is a 550-staff regional facility and was one of the first U.S. hospitals to invest in integrative medicine, community wellness and fitness centers, a bariatric surgery center, and other innovative community services. GRMC is spearheading the Heart of Grinnell initiative through the vision of its CEO, Todd Linden, and the support of its board. HeartMath has been a leader in the development of innovative, scientifically-based approaches and technologies for stress reduction since the early 1990s. HeartMath clients have included healthcare, corporate, governmental and educational institutions – including the Mayo Clinic, Duke Health System, more than 20 Veterans Affairs (VA) medical centers, Motorola, Stanford Business School and others.

The Heart of Grinnell project seeks to build a broad collaboration within the Grinnell community – including GRMC, Grinnell College, local businesses, the public school system, social services agencies, the juvenile justice system, government services and churches. All members of the community will benefit from a coordinated effort to lower stress and work together more effectively. Other key stakeholders like the University of Iowa’s College of Public Health, the state and federal government, and, perhaps, a large insurance company could make the project even stronger. The project is starting with a series of pilot projects that are building support and momentum.

The long-term goal is to develop a longitudinal research project to understand the impact of a concerted effort to provide stress intervention to the entire community.

“SINCE BOTH IN IMPORTANCE AND TIME, HEALTH PRECEDES DISEASE, SO WE OUGHT TO CONSIDER FIRST HOW HEALTH MAY BE PRESERVED, AND THEN HOW ONE MAY BEST CURE DISEASE.” *GALEN (C. 170 AD).*

The Heart of Grinnell is a collaboration between Grinnell Regional Medical Center (GRMC) and HeartMath. Research has shown the profound impact that a positive stress reduction program based on emotional regulation can have on the health and well-being of a community. The project aims to create a new baseline for community health and wellness through the application of coherence. Coherence has been studied in biology where flocks of birds, schools of fish and pacemaker cells in the human heart all provided examples of synchronized, coherent systems. Research since the mid-1990s has demonstrated the importance of psychophysiological coherence to human health and well-being. Simply said, coherence is a state of synchronization in which all parts can function in a more efficient, balanced way. Coherence applies to the human system mentally, emotionally and physically.

METRICS

As a longitudinal research study, many metrics might be utilized for the project. The stress and well-being survey, designed by HeartMath, is central to collecting psychometric data that could be correlated to additional metrics such as:

- Absenteeism/sick leave
- Employee and customer satisfaction
- Health risk appraisal (HRA) data
- Injuries/accidents
- Workers compensation claims/costs
- Student academic performance
- Incidence of spousal and child abuse

PROGRAM DESIGN AND DELIVERY

Core to the Heart of Grinnell are the proprietary programs and technologies developed at HeartMath. These will be delivered through workshops, coaching, Web-based support tools and HeartMath’s award-winning emWave® handheld and computer-based technologies. HeartMath’s stress reduction techniques, combined with the personalized feedback of the emWave system, have demonstrated significant outcomes in chronic conditions such as hypertension, diabetes and congestive heart failure, as well as organizational performance, staff and patient satisfaction, and academic performance.

As stress continues its march, one community has a vision for fighting back...with the heart.



BRUCE CRYER is President and CEO of HeartMath LLC, an innovative performance improvement firm. HeartMath works with several top 10 U.S. hospital systems, as well as Britain’s NHS, and its research-based program has received the Management Innovations Award from the American College of Healthcare Executives. Bruce is on the faculty of several leadership programs including the Stanford Executive Program and the Center for the Health Professions at UCSF. His article, *Pull the Plug on Stress*, was published in the Harvard Business Review. He is the co-author (with Doc Childre) of *From Chaos to Coherence: The Power to Change Performance*.

