

Katie Johnson: Good morning and welcome to Apple a Day, Lake Region Healthcare's health and wellness segment where we feature news and information you can use to live a healthier life. I'm Katie Johnson, your host, and we are here this morning with my guest, Shannon Terry, who is the Public Information Officer at Otter Tail County and my guest as we are here in our first week of our Community Wellness Challenge. Good morning Shannon.

Shannon Terry: Good morning Katie.

Katie Johnson: For those of you that don't know, Lake Region Healthcare has a community health challenge going on right now that is a little bit different than what we've done in the past. You might recall we've asked you to exercise and be active during the winter months in our health challenges in the past, but in 2018 we're expanding it to include all the components of wellness, with a specific focus on one of those components each week. We're kicking off the challenge by focusing on environmental wellness. That's why Shannon is our guest today. She will help us understand more about what environmental wellness is and how we can practice it. How we can improve it in our life and enjoy our environment more and leave our environment in a better place after we leave, right?

Shannon Terry: Yes.

Katie Johnson: Shannon, tell me first of all, how do you interpret environmental wellness? What does it mean to you?

Shannon Terry: I believe that we have to look at the big picture. So we're looking at we all need clean water, we need to have fresh air, we need to look at the resources. But we also have to look just at our environments at home. Getting rid of toxins, maybe reducing toxins in our cleaning products, but also just getting rid of maybe old pesticides or old paint that you want out of your house. Just having that idea too that we're conserving what we have also has a lot to do with our wellness.

Katie Johnson: Those are all great points. Considering all of those different facets, what is it about environmental health that gets you most excited in your experience, in your work, and in your personal life?

Shannon Terry: It's the three Rs. Reduce, reuse and recycle. What's really important is if we keep in mind what a significant difference all three of those make to our environment and even our wellness, and even that feeling that we're contributing to something, it all adds up and it does make a difference.

Katie Johnson: It certainly does. I'd like to talk maybe a little bit more about each one of them individually. Reduce. Reuse. Recycle. How can we do those three things in some really simple ways?

Shannon Terry: Recycling now I think we all have that down. We have services provided by our communities that will collect our recycling. We probably all have storage places in our homes that we have as part of our daily routine. When it comes to reuse, I think this is something maybe we have to think about a little bit more. That we start to maybe use the shopping bags that are reusable and take those to the store. I think that's something that's becoming more of a norm now for people. But reducing is vitally important today so that we can conserve our resources. It can be simple things like reducing the things that we would typically throw away. Reduce your sandwich bags. Order your soda at a restaurant without a straw. Just some simple things that we start to reduce. Take your coffee mug into a café and just ask them to fill your to go cup.

Just some of those little simple things that we really think about can make a difference. They'll make us feel better. They're good for the planet. If you keep those three Rs in mind, I think it really makes a difference.

Katie Johnson: The county has a lot of goals and initiatives that are aimed at helping our community and our county be more environmentally friendly. Can you tell us about some specific things that Otter Tail County has set for goals and initiatives to help us all achieve them?

Shannon Terry: It is going to be a very exciting year. We have just completed two programs for single sort recycling. So the day where we had to put everything in our separate containers is gone in two communities, Fergus Falls and Perham now can put everything in one. The response has been overwhelming, the participation has really increased. It's just wonderful, and you can see that difference when you see the piles and you see all the new carts around town that are out on the curbside.

We also are going to start a challenge of our own for 2018, which is a Toward Zero Waste challenge. The idea is that the more we become aware of what we're throwing away, the more we're apt to make changes. We're asking people to do an audit of their own garbage and we mean lay it out on a tarp and sort through it. What do you have, how much do you have. Then try and make changes for about six months. We'll have monthly workshops that'll kind of carry you through and give you some tips. At the end, we're going to celebrate the reduction of waste and really share some of the challenges and the benefits that you had from reducing your waste. Just really get the kids involved, and just have it be really a family event.

Katie Johnson: Very cool. So a Zero Waste Challenge. If someone listening is interested in learning more about that or maybe signing up, how could they do that?

Shannon Terry: If they visit the county's website and they go to the public education page on the Solid Waste Department they will find a [fillable 00:05:11] form. They can sign up and they will get information.

Katie Johnson: Very cool. You also mentioned in our earlier conversations that January is radon awareness month. Radon in our environment can be a detriment. What kinds of things do you have going on specifically to bring awareness to that topic now in January?

Shannon Terry: In January, and really anytime, you can go to the Public Health Department at the Government Services Center in Fergus Falls on Fir Avenue, and the Public Health Department is very happy to give you a free radon kit. They have all of the directions, you send it in, there is no charge, and then you will get the results. You can also then, once you have your results and if they're not very positive, you can take them back to the Public Health Department for some resources of what you can do if you have high levels. They'll be in partnership with you.

Katie Johnson: You mentioned single sort recycling for two communities, Perham and Fergus Falls. I wanted to circle back and touch on recycling in general for people who live in communities that don't have single sort recycling. Do you have some tips for the rest of us? I happen to live in Underwood. How can we make recycling easier, maybe number one, and how do we really know what can we recycle and what can't we? What shouldn't we be putting in those recycling bins?

Shannon Terry: Be patient is my number one advice because it will be coming to your areas throughout the whole entire county. We just have some logistics and some strategic planning that we need to follow through but it will be there.

Katie Johnson: Awesome.

Shannon Terry: Right now the advice would be we have pictures on the bins to kind of give you an idea. Paper, really almost all paper you can put in there, there's no limitations and it can all be placed in the same bin, magazines to newspapers to office paper. Plastics is probably where the most confusion is, it's only number ones and number twos with a neck. So if you find something that's a rigid plastic - a cover, a yogurt container - really that doesn't have a neck, then it cannot be recycled at this time. But again, those changes are coming forward that you'll have more options in the future.

Katie Johnson: A question I also wanted to ask you is I'm guessing you hear from people all kinds of excuses why they haven't been more diligent about reducing, reusing or recycling. What kinds of excuses are maybe the most common and what do you reply with?

Shannon Terry: It takes too much time. And, actually, that is understandable. When you have to sort it takes up too much room, it's too complicated, there's too many rules, and it does make sense. But once you get in the habit and you have that routine of recycling, you should be able to overcome it.

Another thing is planning. I really encourage people to bring their own containers to a restaurant so they don't have to have a styrofoam carry out. Use a stainless steel straw and bring these things ... But that, again, takes planning. You almost

have to have something that you would carry in your purse, or maybe in the trunk of your car or the back seat. Almost with shopping bags, too. We have to plan and we have to have them available and ready to go and then I think we're more apt to kind of follow through with our practices.

Katie Johnson: I love that. That's something that has never crossed my mind, to bring my own container to a restaurant to avoid leftover kit that they give you that really isn't good for our environment. We have all kinds of tips like this, we're trying to gather more of them, and we'll continue adding them on our community challenge website. LRHC.org/WOW. WOW stands for Wheel of Wellness, and you'll see environmental health is the featured topic this week if you visit that website. It's the first one at the top. If you click on that we've got all kinds of ideas for you. You can still join our challenge and gain some points, earn some points for practicing good environmental wellness and all the components of wellness: exercising, emotional health, social health, intellectual, spiritual. We've got things to do in all of those categories to really help you hopefully balance out your total wellness over the course of the winter of 2018. And thanks to our foundation, we'll be giving away a \$2,000 dollar travel voucher to one lucky winner chosen from among those who are participating with us.

Shannon, thanks for your great advice on how we can improve our environmental health this week. Any last tips for our listeners and our challenge participants?

Shannon Terry: Just understand that it really does make a difference when you reduce, you reuse and you recycle. It makes a difference to your wellness and it makes a difference to the environment.

Katie Johnson: It certainly does. We invite you all to join us. Check out LRHC.org/WOW and check out the Otter Tail County website. More information on the Zero Waste Challenge, the radon testing kit, reducing, reusing, recycling, single sort recycling, and all of the things that Shannon talked about today can be found there as well. Shannon Terry, my guest today on Apple a Day, as we talk about environmental wellness, our wellness dimension theme for this week in the Lake Region Healthcare Community Health Challenge, the Wheel of Wellness. Shannon, thanks for joining me today.

Shannon Terry: Thank you, Katie.

Katie Johnson: Shannon Terry and Katie Johnson remind you that there is so much to do here. Stay healthy for it. Have a great day.