

Katie Johnson:

Good morning. And welcome to Apple A Day. It's Lake Region Healthcare's Health and Wellness Show where we feature news and information you can use to live a healthier life. I am Katie Johnson, your host, and my guest today is Ben Graf. He is the newest member of our Provider team, but a very familiar face to us here at Lake Region Healthcare, and I'm excited to introduce you to him in his new role this morning. Good morning, Ben.

Ben Graf:

Good morning.

Katie Johnson:

Thanks for taking a few minutes to join me here as you are coming back to the Lake Region Healthcare family. I'd like to share with our listeners what your journey's been like and what you're going to be doing with us now, so let's just jump right in. Give us your background story. Where are you from originally and what is your path look like leading up to joining us now as a PA?

Ben Graf:

Sure. So I am originally from Fergus, so I'm a Native. I've lived here pretty much my entire life, so I went to high school here. I went to the local community college for a couple of years after high school, and then I went to NDSU in Fargo for a couple of years. I studied Respiratory Therapy, and I end up coming back to Fergus Falls after going to NDSU, and I worked here at Lake Region as a respiratory therapist for four years total, full time. And then in 2020 I went back to PA School and graduated just this last spring, and then I was brought on here to work in primary care, primarily in the Elbow Lake Clinic at this point. So that's just a brief rundown of where I'm from, what I'm doing, and how I got here.

Katie Johnson:

That's awesome. We love it when we have locals who want to come back and serve in the community they grew up in, and you're a great example of that. Tell me what it is that prompted you to decide to come back to Lake Region after you went to PA School, and maybe particularly if there's something about being in the Elbow Lake Clinic that excites you?

Ben Graf:

Sure. So I completed a nine month primary care clinical rotation at Elbow Lake. I was with Stefany Nordby. She's one of the primary care PAs down there, and I just had a really good overall experience there in the primary care world. It was a great atmosphere. It was such a great team environment down there, and I think that's a thing that is seen both in Elbow Lake and in the Fergus Falls campus. I just feel like everyone knows each other very well, and then that just fosters a really good environment for patients as well. So it's just been a good transition for me to be familiar with the environment and whatnot, so that's what prompted me to stay.

Katie Johnson:

That's awesome. I couldn't agree more. What does it mean to you to provide high quality care to your patients? Maybe talk a little bit about your care philosophy.

Ben Graf:

Sure. I guess, one of my philosophies that I try to follow in providing good care would just be knowing everybody really well on a personal level. I like to know what my patient's hobbies are, what they did or do for a living. What support system they have at home, those things are just really important to be able to treat the patient as a whole, and just understand both their physical and emotional needs, so that's what I like to go by, is just understanding them on a personal level.

Katie Johnson:

I think that really fits well with the person-centered care that we strive to deliver at Lake Region Healthcare, at all the sites. When we talk about what differentiates Lake Region Healthcare from some of the other providers, I really think it is those personal relationships. And you've worked in healthcare for a long time, what is it that you like most about working in healthcare?

Ben Graf:

I would say it's probably just the relationships that you build with patients and meeting new people, learning about what their background is like, and then also the teamwork is what I really enjoy the most. I think that might stem from my history of being in sports and whatnot, that it's really rewarding to be a part of that team. And there's such a large amount that goes into making a good patient experience from what we as providers do, and then what nursing staff and laboratory and radiology personnel, and just being a part of that whole team and seeing everything come together to reach that ultimate goal of quality patient care is what I really enjoy the most.

Katie Johnson:

Yeah. It really brings to light our value of collaboration. It takes all of us working together, and it is so rewarding to be able to do that. As our listeners might know, we've been talking about this on the show, and if they've been around here or know anyone who works at Lake Region, the transition of our electronic medical record to Epic is a big change that's happening around here. I'd be curious to know what your thoughts are on that?

Ben Graf:

Yeah. I haven't worked with Epic in a provider role in a previous job I had as a respiratory therapist. I did work with Epic to some extent, and I am familiar with the layout of it, and I think it's going to be a very good thing for our patients. It's going to make our job as healthcare providers easier, and it's going to be better from the patient standpoint. I think they're going to be able to be more involved in their care by using the patient portal and being able to communicate, and just being able to understand the process and what is going on with their care, I think it's going to be a really nice aspect of it.

Katie Johnson:

Yeah. I think the user friendliness of MyChart as a patient portal is really going to be a game changer for patients. And like you said, just being able to have a more seamless care experience too, especially as a provider in Elbow Lake, knowing that what you see in Elbow Lake is the same thing if they end up in the emergency room in Fergus Falls or the walk-in clinic here. We've just got one seamless record and that's really going to be a nice change.

Ben Graf:

Absolutely.

Katie Johnson:

What about when you're not working? What do you like to do in your free time?

Ben Graf:

Yeah. I'm an outdoors guy. I enjoy anything from hiking to biking, camping, fishing, hunting, just to name a few. For example, last week I was in Colorado hiking through the beautiful Rocky Mountain National Park with my wife McKenna, so that just paints a good picture of the things that I like to do.

Katie Johnson:

Nice.

Ben Graf:

And fall right now is in full swing and it's my favorite time of the year to be outside and doing these sorts of things, so that's what I like to do with my free time.

Katie Johnson:

It sounds like you're in the right place both personally and professionally.

Ben Graf:

Exactly.

Katie Johnson:

That's awesome. Anything else you'd like us or listeners to know about you or your practice at Lake Region Healthcare or the Elbow Lake clinic?

Ben Graf:

Yeah. I mean, my goal when I work in Elbow Lake and primary care is just to provide a wide range of services. I mean, I'm going to see every patient of all ages, wide range of medical concerns. I'm really fortunate to be working with such an outstanding team down in Elbow Lake, and I'm excited to be able to provide care to patients close to home.

Katie Johnson:

Well, we are lucky to have you there. We're so glad to have you on the team. Before we close, one health tip. We're entering the holiday winter season, what's your tip for our listeners?

Ben Graf:

Enjoy the time with your friends and family during the holidays. Enjoy your favorite holiday meals and desserts. One day is not going to set back most people, but at the same time try to stay active during the winter months. It's good for our mental and physical health. I'm guilty of not being as active during the winter months, but try to find something to stay active. I'm going to try to do snowshoeing, this year is what my goal is going to be, so try to find something like that to keep you moving and whatnot.

Katie Johnson:

Great tip.

Ben Graf:

Yeah.

Katie Johnson:

I bought snowshoes last year.

Ben Graf:

Awesome.

Katie Johnson:

And I loved it. So I'm looking forward to hearing how you like snowshoeing.

Ben Graf:

Yes, I'm excited.

Katie Johnson:

Great advice. Ben Graf, physician assistant back to the Lake Region healthcare team, serving in our Elbow Lake Clinic as a physician assistant in primary care there. Welcome back to the team and thanks for joining us this morning.

Ben Graf:

Thanks, Katie.

Katie Johnson:

Ben Graf and Katie Johnson on Apple a Day today, reminding you at Lake Region Healthcare we are here for you always. Have a great day.