Seminary Promotes Healthy Lifestyles

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Seminary promotes healthy lifestyles

The Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary recently initiated a health promotion program that encourages students to balance schoolwork with eating well in addition to getting enough sleep and regular exercise.

“Niels-Erik Andreasen, president of Andrews, expressed his desire to become the healthiest university in the United States,” says Tom Shepherd, professor of New Testament Interpretation, director of the Ph.D. in religion and Th.D. programs, and chair of the Seminary’s Health Promotion Committee. “Our Adventist health message is about living a healthy lifestyle so we can serve God well and long.”

The Committee began last fall after Shepherd spoke to the Seminary students about the history of Adventist health, why health is important, and the commitment each of them should make to take care of themselves.

Committee members meet once a month with three goals in mind: health information, student activities and structural change. Health information includes posters to remind students to make healthy decisions, and activities such as a health fair and cooking school. They also analyze and seek to implement positive changes in the departments.

At the health fair, students were able to fill out a simple form, measure their body mass index (BMI), determine their exercise endurance, check their blood pressure, and discuss ways to improve their health. Five attendees were found to have hypertension, or high blood pressure, a disease that can go unnoticed if not regularly checked, but is easily treated with medication.

Shepherd explains that there are five levels of fitness, ranging from sedentary to extremely athletic.

“The biggest change in heart attack risk occurs between level 1, sedentary, to level 2, mild exercise, in which if you walk at least 20 minutes, three times a week, the risk of a heart attack will be cut in half,” explains Shepherd.

He goes on to explain how making simple changes in your lifestyle can lead to lasting health benefits.

“The best exercise is the one that you will keep doing,” says Shepherd with a grin. “I have not missed a day of walking in seven years. Aerobic exercise, lifting weights and being a vegetarian have made such a positive difference in my life.”

Expressing his earnest desire to promote health at Andrews, one suggestion Shepherd had was to provide a health and wellness center on campus that would be completely free of charge for students, faculty and staff.

“If we really want to be the healthiest university in the nation, we have to be serious about it and do things that promote health,” he says.

Shepherd points out that, in general, college and university students feel they are overwhelmed with coursework and have very little time to focus on their health.

“One issue is that, at many schools, the fee for taking between 12 to 16 classes is the same,” he explains. “It encourages undergraduate students to take a full load, which for many students is too much. But if they don’t take the full 16 credits, they feel as though they are wasting their money.” Shepherd suggests that if undergraduate students could pay for the amount of credits they are taking instead of paying one flat rate, they will be able to make healthier decisions regarding time management and health priorities.

“There are too many people saving money, but losing their health,” says Shepherd. “In the Seminary, we have chosen to invest in encouraging health and making decisions based on the values and mission of the church. We need to help spread the good news: the gospel of good health!”

Eloise Ravell, student writer, Division of Integrated Marketing & Communication

Darren Heslop

The Seminary Health Promotion Committee works hard to provide healthy lifestyle education opportunities for students throughout the year, including exercise and healthy cooking demonstrations.