

Bottom line: Keeping execs healthy pays off

One-day programs identify issues before they can affect businesses BY BRETT JOHNSON

Steve Colson wasn't waiting to get back to his house that evening.

The business owner was so profoundly thrilled about what he had spent the day doing that he had to call his friend during the drive just to tell him about it.

What did he go on to excitedly describe?

His all-day-long, expensive checkup at a hospital.

More specifically, it was his experience with **Atlantic Health System's** thorough executive health program that he recounted.

"And I know it's crazy for someone to get a 10-hour physical and come away saying that was an amazing experience," said Colson, co-owner of **Huston Lumber & Supply Co. Inc.**, **International Swimming Pools Inc.** and **Eastern Engineered Wood Products Inc.** "But it's true. I can't stress enough how enjoyable it was."

That's because what he experienced is not your standard physical.

It's an extensive, personalized hospital visit with exams and testing galore. It's also luxurious in its own way — patients get their own goodies-stocked waiting room, replete with a private bathroom and shower.

Atlantic Health even offers its patients a ride to and from the site of the testing — **Morristown Medical Center** — plus a dinner for two and a vacation-like hotel stay as part of the package.

Atlantic Health's program is part of a batch of other executive health programs across the state that are quickly gaining popularity, in spite of the hefty price tag (ranging up to \$10,000 for participants) that accompanies them.

"It has become an important program for any big hospital system to have," said Dr. **Damion Martins**, director of Atlantic's orthopedics and sports medicine as well as its corporate health and executive health program. "It allows you to bring many services together in a coherent, convenient structure. It helps coordinate care."

C-suite executives and other more affluent individuals see the value in getting a clean bill of health from five or so specialists during the day, who all contribute to a folder the size of a small novella that profiles each patient's health.

The stakeholders in that executive's company also see the value. Investors in particular understand that human capital is difficult to replace.

Case in point: The ordinarily sturdy **Apple** stock took a percentage point drop the minute former CEO Steve Jobs died in 2011.

That desire to see a firm's essential leadership healthy — by catching life-threatening diseases early on — has resulted in the flourishing of executive health programs such as Atlantic Health's, which has grown immensely since its 2011 founding.

It was started 10 years after the start of the state's most well-known and established executive health program: the **Princeton Longevity Center**.

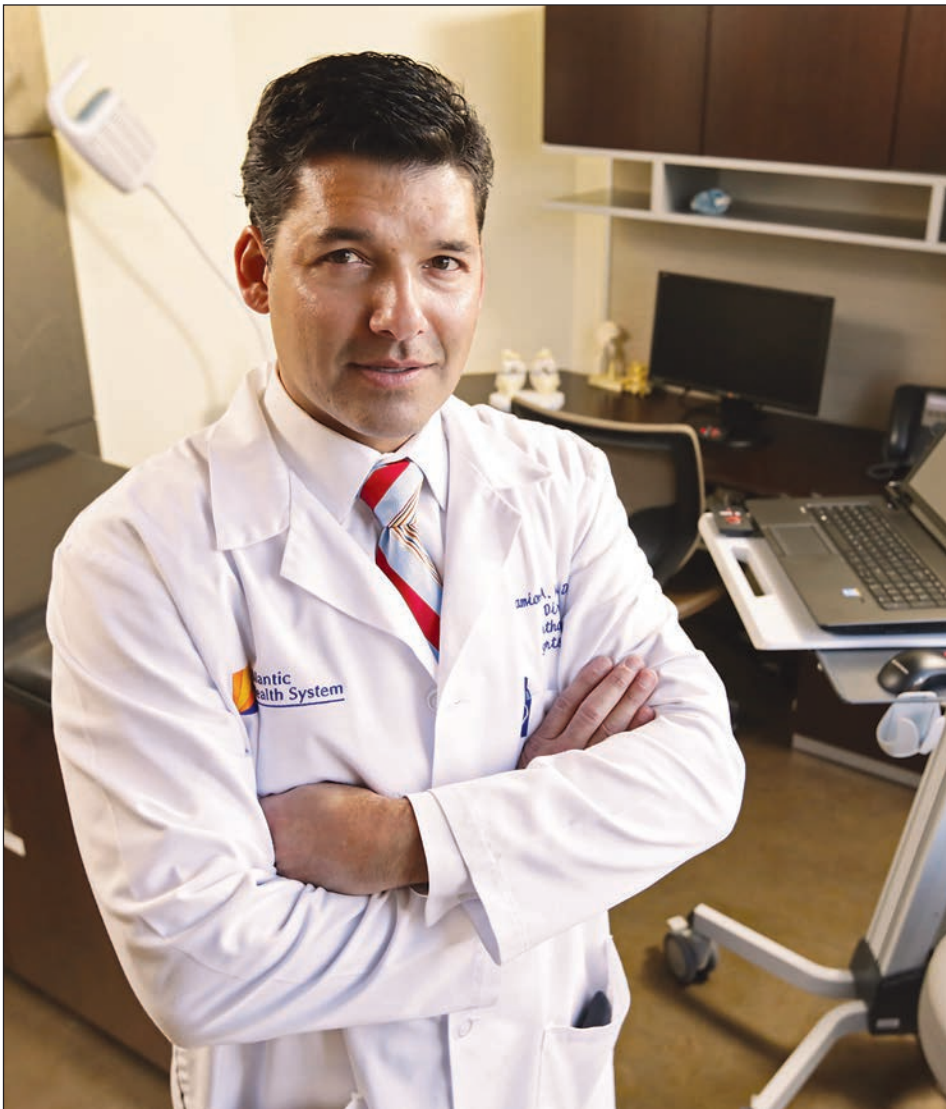


New Jersey businessman Steve Colson on his full-day physical: "I can't stress enough how enjoyable it was." -AARON HOUSTON

Andrea Lanza, director of patient and corporate services for the Princeton program, said executive health programs have proliferated around them, paired with a trend of more preventative medicine in general.



Atlantic Health's executive health center in Morristown has a spa-like quality. - AARON HOUSTON



Dr. Damion Martins runs Atlantic Health's executive health center in Morristown. - AARON HOUSTON

"Patients are now seeking out new tests and preventive exams and expecting more from an annual physical," she added. "And the health care system is placing more emphasis on prevention as a means to reduce costs."

Princeton Longevity Center has seen growth of 10 to 25 percent each year since its inception. It sees more than 2,500 patients per year across its three centers in New Jersey, Connecticut and Virginia.

Atlantic Health, on the other hand, decided to model its program after a different philosophy: Take only one patient a day, and really take your time with each of them. Because of that, it sees far fewer patients annually.

"And we want to put individuals with the experts directly," Martins said. "When (patients) are told about their heart test, they want to hear about it from a cardiologist. ... We want them to leave this room with an understanding of what they need to do, not with referrals."

Atlantic Health charges a flat rate of \$10,000, a couple thousand dollars more than Princeton's program and others.

What keeps attracting individuals to such a premium service has a lot to do with what Martins calls a "fear factor."

Martins said it's a tragic death of a family member or friend that tends to make people rethink their own health — and want to examine all aspects of it.

Besides that, business executives as a whole are a population at risk.

Senior executives have a much higher risk of obesity and thus of heart complications, according to the 2013 **Rippe Health** Assessment Study of Senior Executives.

The survey revealed that 73 percent of these individuals live a sedentary lifestyle, which can lead to diabetes, heart disease and many other conditions.

"A majority of (senior executives also) have issues with stress and lack of sleep,

A healthy appreciation

Matt Higgins, co-founder of RSE Ventures and former New York Jets executive, knows from experience how important monitoring your health can be.

"I was a typical executive, working long hours, not particularly worried about my health," he admits.

Then, six years ago, he learned he had testicular cancer.



Matt Higgins

The diagnosis — and the subsequent treatment — changed him.

"Having survived, I've become evangelical about monitoring my health," he said. "I don't want to find out that I'm a ticking time bomb. If there's steps I can

take to address my health, I want to have that opportunity.

"You can invest so much in other areas of life in order to optimize them, like ensuring that your company is functioning properly ... or that your fantasy football team is in good shape. Because of that, some neglect the most important aspect of your life: your health."

His newfound appreciation for the fragility of life is why he visited Atlantic Health's executive health program two years ago. And his lifestyle changes were pleasantly reflected in his results ... and his work.

"Listen, if something happens to you as an executive, that has a trickle-down effect on so many different lives — from family to people you work with," he said. "You have to do all you can to take care of yourself."

and maybe they function well despite that," Martins said. "But lack of sleep can cause increased weight, higher blood pressure and poor sugar control."

The potential health risks seemingly are endless. That's why Martins stresses that Atlantic Health needs to check them all — and can do it in a day.

"We have sophisticated, savvy clients — even people in the health care industry — who admit that this isn't something they could do on their own," he said. "It would take them two months and 10 different office visits."

And patients on the day of the executive health visit don't seem the mind that it may take up to 10 hours straight.

Colson attested to each specialist in this program being equal parts fun and professional, which helps pass the time.

"That's a big part of why I've been so eager to refer this program to others," he said.

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