

Gyms see members' focus shift toward overall wellness

By Patrick Ball/Staff Writer

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Concord -

With health insurance providers offering reimbursements for gym memberships, and widespread information about epidemics such as childhood obesity and diabetes, more — and different — kinds of people are making working out part of their daily routines.

As pumping iron has been matched in popularity by power yoga, fitness clubs and gyms alike have moved toward taking a more holistic approach, offering classes, instruction and even advice about nutrition.



Photo by Ellen Bullock/Staff Photographer

Stoddard Melhado works out under the watchful eye of owner/trainer Phil Morris last week at The Fitness Group.

“A lot of people are doing different things: More than ‘I’m going to curl. I’m going to bench,’” said Peter Hantzis, weekend sales manager at Gold’s Gym in Concord. “People used to come into the gym to get into shape, and it was a chore. Now it is part of their lives. A lot of people will tell you they don’t feel right if they don’t work out.”

In fact, Hantzis said Gold’s employees could practically set their watches by clients, who come in at the same time every day and are increasingly eager to ask other for help. “That’s something you definitely wouldn’t have seen a few years ago,” Hantzis said.

“People are more sophisticated about their views of health,” said Phil Morris, owner of the Concord-based Fitness Group, which was among the area’s first stand-alone personal training businesses. “You get people not so much with the image of the muscle-bound guy, but they know what their health needs are.

“You can’t survive today unless you change and grow as a business. We’re not wellness coaches, per se, but a lot of what we do is look at the complete picture,” he said.

Coaching, according to Morris, who has been in the business for 24 years, is the latest in a long line of fads that also includes aerobics, personal training and spinning classes, which have gained

popularity as people of all socioeconomic levels see a greater need for health and wellness, and make attaining well-being a part of their lives.

The coaching concept has been around for a while and over the years has been applied to athletics, careers and to life in general. Newer though is the field of wellness coaching, also called fitness coaching, a trend catching on quickly in the fitness gurus and making its way more slowly into clubs like Concord's Thoreau Club.

The Thoreau Club is one of the first fitness clubs to employ wellness coaches, who put their clients in charge by asking questions instead of barking orders and encouraging clients to establish specific, measurable goals.

"It's not about the weight loss. It's about making lasting behavior changes to achieve that goal," said Laura Klein, a wellness coach who directs the club's Fit Forever program. "I believe that once people come, we can get them into habits that will change their lives."

The Thoreau Club has offered wellness coaching three years now. Klein joined the Fit Forever team last year, and within six months was the club's wellness director. Fit Forever is a 90-day program that offers weekly wellness coaching-sessions, a membership to the club and a nutrition consultation, among other things.

"My vision, and the vision of the Thoreau Club is to have it catch on in the club industry. I see coaching as analogous to personal training. We're just not at that tipping point yet," said Klein, who knows of only a handful of clubs that offer wellness coaching across the country. "

Coaching toes the line between psychology and physicality, and helps people understand why they're doing what they're doing.

"I'm not here to tell you how to do it. What coaches do is extract the information from the client," Klein said. "There's a gap between what they want and where they are. You have to have that ah-ha moment. ... It doesn't have to be dramatic. It could also be a coach asking the right questions. You have to keep probing and asking why, and not assuming that the first response is the real answer."



Photo by Ellen Bullock/Staff Photographer
Ky Melhado of Littleton and Dan Frost of Concord work out last week at The Fitness Group