



A handful of skill is better than a bagful of gold.

-Irish Saying

The Flip Side of Consumerism: Wellness Initiatives

Employers are looking to put more teeth into employee health management programs, in hopes that encouraging better health habits will lead to lower health spending and a more productive workforce, according to Mercer. While the majority of employers offer one or more wellness programs, large employers, in particular, are adding incentives to encourage employees to use the programs or improve health habits:

Nearly one-fifth of the very largest employers (those with 20,000 or more employees) have special plan provisions relating to an employee's smoker status—most often, requiring a lower premium contribution from nonsmokers than from smokers (17 percent). Large employers are increasingly using health risk assessments to learn about their employees' health habits (65 percent, up from 56 percent in 2007)11/21/2008
By Stephen Miller Stephen Miller is an editor/manager for SHRM.

Workers Value Wellness Aid, Seek Lower Premiums

As Americans continue searching for ways to contain their health care costs, the vast majority with access to employer-sponsored wellness benefits are using them. When offered, most U.S. workers: Take advantage of health-related educational tools and resources offered by their employer (79 percent of workers in 2008, up from 74 percent a year earlier). Participate in both blood sugar and cholesterol screenings (77 percent, up from 59 percent).

One reason why: More than half of U.S. workers (51 percent) believe that employer-provided wellness benefits are successful at lowering health care costs, according to the latest Principal Financial Well-Being Index, conducted in the fourth quarter of 2008. The index, which surveys American workers at growing businesses with 10 to 1,000 employees, is released by the Principal Financial Group.

The most recent survey findings also show that: Premiums: 75 percent of surveyed U.S. workers (up from 60 percent a year earlier) expect to pay increased health care premiums in 2009. Deductibles: 43 percent (up from 38 percent) expect to pay higher deductibles.

"Americans face strong financial head winds as we enter the new year against the backdrop of a slowing economy," says Jerry Ripperger, national practice leader of consumer health for the Principal Financial Group. "Rising health care costs are fueling the fire at a time when many Americans are strapped for cash. Fortunately, it appears the majority of workers understand that adopting preventive health care measures not only improves overall health but can drive down costs in the long term." 1/27/2009 By Stephen Miller





"According to the World Health Organization, the United States is the fattest nation, with over half of adults overweight or obese. Why is this a concern, particularly for employers? The answer is also obvious - obesity, which is itself classified as a chronic disease now, can also lead to additional chronic diseases that adversely affect the workplace with resulting higher health care claims, rising health care costs, absenteeism, etc.

Chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, etc., can often be controlled, or even eliminated, by modify-

ing habits and tailoring lifestyles to recommended health patterns. "The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 50% of today's health care costs are attributable to health risks that can be modified by lifestyle behaviors such as diet and activity." (SHRM Knowledge Center, "Wellness Programs: The New Health Value-Add," February 2007) Today, obesity itself is classified as a chronic disease and health care costs for this population are significantly higher than for people of normal weight.

Although promoting healthy lifestyles wasn't originally seen as a concern for the workplace, times have changed, especially since "chronic illnesses account for 75 percent of health care spending" (HR

News, "More Employers Committing to Wellness Initiatives," July 2008).

Employers recognize that it's in everyone's best interest to have healthier employees. Therefore, more organizations are offering various types of benefits strategies aimed at promoting health and wellness, including the use of corporate wellness programs which can include employer-sponsored educational programs.

In fact, "the amount of employers implementing specific wellness programs increased threefold from 2007 to 2008." (HR News, "Workplace Wellness Programs on the Rise in 2008," May 2008).

New Study Finds Liver Cirrhosis May Also Harm Brain and Heart



Cirrhosis of the liver, which kills 25,000 people in Unites States annually, is often a result of alcohol abuse or hepatitis C.

The disorder occurs when the liver is damaged and can't properly filter toxins. People with the disorder also tend to have heart-rate issues and a condition known as hepatic (liver) encephalopathy, which occurs when an increasing amount of unfiltered toxins reaches the brain. Hepatic encephalopathy can affect both physical and mental performance.

All three conditions are linked to increased systemic inflammation, say a team from the University College London Medical School and the Royal Free Hospital in London.

In studying people with cirrhosis, the team found strong ties between heart rate issues and hepatic encephalopathy. A person's level of inflammatory cytokines -- molecules that switch on the body's response to inflammation -- climbed as cognitive impairment increased and heart rate variability fell.

The study is published in the February issue of the American Journal of Physiology-Gastrointestinal and Liver Physiology.



Want fresh air? Just add plants

Plants ... they make our lives more livable. Literally. According to a TED 2009 conference speaker, Kamal Meattle, their ability to clear airborne toxins (such as VOCs) and boost oxygen levels are profound.

And they can have a huge impact on indoor air—often much more polluted than the air outdoors.

Meattle performed an experiment at the Paharpur Business Centre and Software Technology Incubator Park in New Delhi, India, using approximately four detoxifying plants, such as mother-in-law tongue and areca palm, per person in the office space.

Eye irritation dropped by 52 percent, headaches by 24 percent, and asthma by 9 percent.

As a result, sick days decreased and productivity went up.

Radha Marcum February 11th, 2009



March 2009



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1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
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