

## **WELLNESS PROGRAM**

Wellness programs have become increasingly popular in recent years, probably due to the many economic benefits employers can reap from them. In studies of companies that have instituted wellness programs, the great majority saw a drop in employee medical costs; however, there are many reasons to promote wellness besides fighting the rising cost of health insurance. A successful wellness program can:

- Lower absenteeism and disability claims;
- Reduce workplace accidents and workers' compensation claims;
- Lower employee training costs due to reduced turnover;
- Increase employee morale, team building, and productivity;
- Reduce lost work time due to employee illness;
- Help companies recruit employees;
- Pay for itself- studies indicate a return on investment of \$2 to \$7 for every dollar spent.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, more than 75 percent of employers' health care costs and productivity losses are related to employee lifestyle choices. Successful wellness programs can educate employees about unhealthy lifestyle choices and help them to correct harmful behaviors. Wellness programs can be good for the company and good for the employee.

## **HEALTH RISKS**

There are numerous health risks that you can address through a wellness program. The three biggest threats facing the American workforce are obesity, tobacco use, and stress. Together, these lifestyle factors contribute to lost productivity and absenteeism among other problems, but a wellness program can work to combat all three and more. Since a wellness program cannot address every health issue, it makes sense to focus on those with the greatest impact.

The most difficult part of a wellness program that attempts to combat these kinds of issues is motivating people to make the changes and keeping them motivated. Employees must want to make changes in these behaviors if they are going to be successful in stopping them.

## **BEGINNING A WELLNESS PROGRAM**

1. Begin with executive management. Without executive management's support, a wellness strategy can fall flat.
2. Analyze the problem. Look at your healthcare claims and analyze the trends.
3. Hold an initial wellness meeting. Invite your key stakeholders both inside and outside the company.

4. Consider both healthful and unhealthful employees. Since 85 percent of claims are usually attributed to 15 percent of claimants, it's essential to reach those with the most costly conditions while also reaching people who are at risk for developing preventable diseases in the future.
5. Be sure to set short-term goals for the wellness programs. Be sure to set some realistic short-term goals based on your key areas of concern.
6. Find out what staff members are thinking. Hold some focus groups to determine where individuals are with wellness. What's working? What isn't?
7. Be certain you've a high-impact Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Your first wellness dollars should go into upgrading your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
8. Be sure to set three to five year goals for health care savings and measure them.
9. Be sure to set goals for organizational health. Consider the more intangible benefits of a wellness program and quantify them whenever possible.
10. Add specifics to your short and long-term plan. Include a program strategy, a communication strategy, and an incentive strategy that'll fit with your company culture.

## **BENEFITS TO WELLNESS PROGRAMS**

- Weight reduction
- Improved fitness
- Increased stamina
- Lower levels of stress
- Increased well-being, self-image and self-esteem

Thanks to modern medicine, life expectancy for Americans has continually increased. How much we enjoy these additional years, nevertheless, depends greatly on how we've lived our lives. If our quality of life is to remain high so that we can fully enjoy these additional years, we must practice good eating habits, be active and refrain from using tobacco products.

**Content Resource: Centers for Disease Control** (Users of Safety Talk are advised to determine the suitability of the information as it applies to local situations and work practices and its conformance with applicable laws and regulations).

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