

A white paper to help you grow your business

Building a culture of health: The new paradigm

Creating a culture of health today may borrow from the old in the form of basics, strive for the new in social support – or combine the best of both worlds. Sharing their successes, benefits advisors, employers and employees can connect the dots and achieve win-win solutions to enhance everyone's future.

According to a 2010 *Workforce Management* survey of employers and employees, 85 percent of U.S. companies don't believe the new healthcare legislation will make for a healthier America. Rather, they believe other measures must be put in place to curb costs. Both parties also agree the workplace plays a prominent role in encouraging healthier lifestyle behaviors. This common ground sets the stage for taking a closer look at the meaning of culture and how it can be better utilized to shape the future health of organizations and individuals alike.

Culture refers to the social forces that shape behavior and beliefs through mechanisms such as norms, support, modeling, training, rewards and communications. "Culture is about changing or establishing behaviors, rather than simply talking about them," explains Jennifer Bruno, senior director of wellness and prevention at Johnson & Johnson's global health services.

Wellness programs alone typically cannot create a corporate or personal culture of health and well-being. Improving and sustaining employee health is not a program which comes and goes. Rather, it's a mindset and a commitment that will stand the test of time. That's not to say specific, targeted health promotion programs are not working. To foster permanent change, however, employers will need to look beyond wellness programs to actions that shape behavior and beliefs about health.

Clearly, wellness programs can help offset the cost of unhealthy lifestyles and resulting chronic conditions. But are they the magic bullet for creating a culture of health in your organization? With health care costs still on the rise, and chronic conditions remaining prevalent, standalone programs may not be enough.

Solutions can range from strikingly familiar concepts, such as a return to the basics and medical self-care programs, to a new focus on developing supportive social communities in the workplace.

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– *Workforce Management* survey, 2010

Back to the basics: eat right, exercise more

Beyond health risk assessments, health coaching and countless online resources, employers need to return to promoting the fundamentals of sound nutrition and physical activity. The basics of eating right and getting regular exercise never go out of style.

Ann G. Kulze, M.D., an authority on nutrition, says, “Just by eating certain foods, you can radically reduce your chances of becoming ill, while [at the same time] transforming your overall health and well-being.” Employers who take a powerful statement like Dr. Kulze’s to heart provide resources to help employees better understand how to eat right. They offer healthy choices in the corporate cafeteria and vending machines, substitute fruit and high-fiber snacks for sugary treats at company meetings, promote seminars on making good food choices – perhaps even have a consulting nutritionist on staff.

“A sound nutritional strategy is a journey to good health,” explains Dr. Kulze. She backs up her statement with information in her book *Eat Right for Life* that covers new “old” topics such as:

- Do your fats and carbs right
- Eat your fruit and veggies
- Select the right proteins
- Drink the right beverages

Physical activity is the other half of the back to basics equation. Simply stressing the need for regular physical activity in and out of the workplace isn’t enough. “There has to be a value proposition for people to engage in physical activity,” says Dr. Steven Aldana.

But how can employers promote the benefits of physical activity in a way that offers employees something of value? Here’s an example: Employees at CDS Global’s print facility in Wilton, Iowa are encouraged to take regular movement breaks throughout the day. The exercises these operators perform – right at their machines – are tailored to the specific muscle groups affected by their work routines.

Is becoming a corporate cheerleader for fitness worth the effort? “If you could take the power of physical activity and sell it as a pill,” says Aldana, “it would be the single most effective medication ever devised in the history of mankind.”

Medical self-care resources: a win-win for employers and employees

Medical self-care programs are nothing new. According to the Consumer Healthcare Products Association, 73 percent of Americans would rather treat themselves at home than see a doctor. What is new about these programs is the increased need in the workplace to help individuals better understand health information, options and costs.

As employers continue to grow a culture of health in their workplaces, medical self-care resources can complement existing programs. By providing immediate access to accurate condition and diagnosis information and treatment options, they allow employees to play a more active role in discussions with their medical

Tips for promoting employee fitness as a way of life:

- Encourage fitness goal-setting; make it a corporate activity.
 - Promote physical activity in your organization; schedule daily movement and encourage the development of walking clubs.
 - Make simple environmental modifications in the workplace; make sure employees feel safe when taking the stairs or walking longer distances to cars.
- David Hunnicutt, “*The Power of Physical Activity Changes Lives and Transforms Culture*,” *Wellness Council of America*, September 2010.

professionals. Self-care also can play a vital role in health improvement and disease prevention, which have a positive impact on productivity and health care costs.

Benefits advisors play a key role in helping employers understand the goals and benefits of today's medical self-care programs. First and foremost, employers need to know the purpose of self-care programs is not to keep employees from seeking and receiving care. Rather, the goal of self-care is to help employees and their families better understand common conditions and know when and how to use the appropriate level of medical care.

According to Larry Chapman, MPH, senior vice president of WebMD Health Services, "the general findings are that medical self-care books and associated training programs reduce visits to health care providers 7 percent and 19 percent, respectively." Findings also point to cost reductions in medical visits due to common or minor conditions. Self-care resources can provide quick and easy access to treat common health problems such as headaches and sore throats. "Studies show clinic visits for minor health conditions are generally reduced about 35 percent as a result of well-designed self-care programs," says Chapman. In addition, such resources can provide education on when to seek medical assistance and health screenings so conditions do not worsen and are easier and less costly to treat at an earlier stage.

Ultimately, it's about improving employees' overall health and well-being, but self-care also can save employees time and money. Instead of enduring the wait and expense of an emergency room visit, for example, self-care resources can provide immediate and effective responses to the questions and situations that might prompt the visit.

Benefits advisors also can point out the impact of self-care programs on employee morale. Employees who feel empowered by good health information are more confident in taking care of their health needs. Benefits advisors can also assist employers by identifying and assessing resources – self-care guides, nurse call lines and self-help websites – available from their current health plan and wellness providers and work to fill any gaps.

- **Self-care guide**

Medical self-care guides are the core element of any self-care program. The guide can be in the form of a single book or series of booklets geared toward common health issues. The best guides address the needs of targeted groups within a particular workplace, such as seniors, men, women, children, teens, pregnant women and those experiencing mental health issues.

Benefits advisors can help a client select the best publication by researching the cost, length, reading level and customization options of guides available in the marketplace. The American Institute for Preventive Medicine and Mayo Clinic's Health Solutions provide a starting point for research into self-care guides for employer groups.

- **Nurse call lines**

Nurse call lines also are a popular self-care resource. They are staffed by registered nurses who are typically available to answer calls 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The nurses provide information on health conditions and can help assess the appropriate level of care needed for present symptoms.

10 reasons to provide employees with a self-care book:

1. Good health is smart business
2. Reduces physician visits
3. Improves patient-physician communication
4. Controls health care costs
5. Helps people make better health decisions
6. Reinforces your health promotion program
7. Disease management
8. Reaches families at home
9. A long-term addition to the family library
10. Sends a positive message

Source: Mayo Clinic Health Solutions

Communication and ongoing reviews of provider outcomes are critical when it comes to self-care resource utilization. The ongoing reviews will help to ensure resources are reaching and helping the intended audiences. Integration with health care programs and the home delivery of self-care guides to better engage families are also must-dos.

The workplace as a supportive social community

Forward thinking employers not only understand that intelligent health decisions create a healthier, more productive workforce, but they also see the workplace as a supportive social community to be leveraged to create and sustain a culture of health. Recognizing the importance of teamwork in influencing healthy behaviors is a positive step toward achieving a culture of health and a healthy employee community.

While employers grasp for one new method after another to get employees engaged in wellness programs, they often miss one of the most important elements: having employees work together with their colleagues to achieve health related goals. Group activities like retreats, sports and internal competitions have long been used to build camaraderie and enthusiasm in the workplace. Why not take the same approach to improve employee health?

Setting and working toward goals together allows employees to share experiences and forge relationships that can translate into better results. Numerous studies have demonstrated that having a social support network contributes to psychological well-being and improves the ability to manage stress.

According to the Mayo Clinic, for example, a social support network can benefit employees when they have decided to make a change to improve their health. To a large extent, success depends on how well motivation can be maintained over time, and a key way to sustain enthusiasm is to get support from colleagues.

Beyond motivation, social support for an employee's health change can also:

- Create a sense of belonging
- Increase one's sense of self-worth
- Foster a feeling of security

Unfortunately, the opposite is also true. The absence of positive, health promoting relationships among colleagues can have a negative impact on motivation and long-term success. *The New England Journal of Medicine* reports that when someone close to a health-program participant becomes overweight, the chance of that person also becoming overweight increases 45 to 171 percent!

Employees aren't the only ones to reap the benefits of social support. For employers, an increase in employee engagement is a top reward. A 2010 employer survey conducted by Towers-Watson confirms that creating a corporate culture supportive of good health conveys a message of caring about the overall well-being of employees. In turn, employees who feel valued are willing to put in extra effort toward organizational goals.

Criteria for selecting a nurse call line provider:

- Staff experience, credentials and protocols
- Accreditation
- Telephone technology
- Backup systems
- Reporting
- Integration with other services (disease management, wellness programs, etc.)
- Cost

Good health contributes both directly and indirectly to reduced health costs and increased productivity. Consider the potential positive impact on a company's bottom line by improvements in the following areas:

- Enhanced performance
- Reduction in daily stress
- Increased confidence and motivation
- Decreased incidence of depression and anxiety
- Improved self-efficacy and happiness
- Positive food selection practices and healthy eating habits
- Higher participation rates in all health related programs and activities

The key to creating a culture of health by leveraging employees' social connections is simple: create and develop opportunities for employees to connect. Here are ideas for getting started:

- Promote team-oriented health promotion programs
- Form activity groups around walking, yoga, training for a fun run
- Utilize social networking media, such as Facebook, to promote your wellness program
- Host wellness activities that encourage teamwork
- Form wellness teams and provide learning opportunities for team leaders and wellness ambassadors
- Get everyone behind a cause, such as a charity event like *Relay for Life*
- Promote internal resources vigorously and regularly
- Publicize success stories and activities
- Sponsor weekly or monthly social support groups
- Host family nights where employees and their families can have fun being healthy

Healthy competition

It began in 2003 with a simple idea to help improve employees' health and fitness: challenge them to eat five cups of fruits and vegetables and walk 10,000 steps a day. The competition, launched by Wegmans Food Market Inc., pitted department against department and store against store, with results published weekly and prizes bestowed on winners.

Two years later, the program was so popular that Wegmans recruited six other Rochester, New York employers, along with the Rochester Business Alliance, to join the campaign.

In the past four years alone, 125,000 employees from more than 300 organizations have participated – walking 49 billion steps and consuming 20 million cups of fruits and vegetables.

“The magic of it was making it competitive and fun, but the collaboration and camaraderie are the key,” says Paul Speranza, Wegmans’ vice chairman. “Say I work for Xerox and my neighbor works for Eastman Kodak, and we’re both doing the same program,” he says. “We can talk about it over the backyard fence.”

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