

Shoestrings As Strong As Steel

How to Effectively Manage Employee Health with a Limited Budget

A Special White Paper by Scott Foster, President, Wellco



Is it hard for you to find enough administrative time to effectively manage the health of your employees? You probably already know that a well-designed employee wellness program can provide a significant return on your investment. That's the easy part. However, a successful program requires moderate investments of both time and your money. You probably don't have enough of either, do you? However, do you still want to provide a smaller-scale employee wellness program and avoid common mistakes? If you are not careful, by the time you are ready to partner with a wellness consultant, you may have wasted precious time and money on ineffective programs. Here are 8 strategies for running a cost-effective health awareness program by maximizing your existing resources and avoiding one of the biggest mistakes.

More Insurance Assurance.

You already know all about your health insurance bill but are you familiar with all of their covered services and resources? Your insurer, or third party administrator (TPA) is one of your vested management partners and should be concerned and helpful regarding the health and well being of your employees. Develop a relationship with your provider and request a list of all of their resources. You might be pleasantly surprised at some of their already covered offerings. Particularly beneficial resources might include 24-hour nurse telephone advice, weight control programs, newsletters, brochures, chronic disease programs (e.g., asthma, diabetes, congestive heart failure, headaches, etc.) and preventive care reminder notices. If you are particularly motivated and have a helpful provider, you may also want to request an aggregate [group only] summary of health care claims and monies paid to better understand how and where your health care dollars are spent. If you can get it, the data can be used to identify trends, help determine health promotion program offerings and contain costs. Finally, as healthcare delivery system continues to change, responses to the above steps can help you decide if it might be time to change to a more proactive provider.

Forget the Apples - Don't Keep the Doctor Away.

Do you already have a hospital-based occupational health provider for services such as new employee physicals, drug testing and injury care? If not, you should. Ask them what services they would be willing to provide to help your workforce. They might enjoy some extra visibility to your employees and their families. Possibilities include providing; preventive health brochures, a regular column in your corporate newsletter, safety information, blood pressure screenings during open enrollment and speaking engagements. Also, encourage your employees to receive an examination with a physician by making it completely free to them (e.g., pay their co-pay or even provide an incentive).

Heal Thyself.

Provide a self-care manual to each of your employees. Self-care provides a very short-term return on your investment because it educates your employees and their families on important topics such as; appropriate use of the emergency room, preventive screenings, generic medications and what to do for specific symptoms and conditions. You can find highly regarded

self-care guides from Hope Health. Amy Cohen, their Vice President of Custom Media Services is wonderful to work with and can be reached at (904) 641-1208 or at acohen@hopehealth.com. The Wellness Councils of America also offers a good guide at www.welcoa.org.

Offer a Shot in the Arm.

Each year, 5% to 20% of the population gets influenza (the flu). The contagiousness of the flu virus can wreak havoc on your productivity and attendance. The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccination each fall. Offer flu prevention information and onsite flu vaccines to each of your employees. Even if you can't afford to pay for the vaccine, onsite convenience will encourage participation.

Assistance Anyone?

Although hidden, behavioral health issues are likely among your most common and costly employee conditions. A helpful employee assistance program (EAP) can be a tremendous resource for your employees and their families. EAP programs range from inexpensive triage and referral programs to full-service behavioral health and counseling services. A 24-hour confidential counseling and referral line can be very helpful. Remember, an EAP program is only as effective as its awareness by your staff. Regularly promote employee assistance and educate your employees regarding common behavioral health issues such as depression. Develop a relationship with your EAP provider and make sure to take advantage of all of their resources (see number 1 above for some ideas).

It Takes a Village.

Mail a reputable, quarterly health newsletter to each of your employee's home. This is a great opportunity to

provide the entire household (employees and dependents) with expert information. A home mailing allows each family to privately learn, share and encourage each other about common health issues. Don't try to create your own health newsletter. It won't even be close to as good as the real thing.

Lunch and Learn. Offer quarterly onsite health seminars. Ask your staff what topics would interest them. Helpful sessions may include: Self-care, nutrition, exercise, safety and possibly "home health issues" such as financing, child raising and caring for an elderly parent. Look for low-cost experts by asking your existing resources (see numbers 1 and 5 above) and contacting local agencies (e.g., hospitals, heart associations, lung association, etc.) Spring for lunch occasionally, if you can.

Don't Go the Fair.

One of the biggest health mistakes organizations can make is to host a health fair. A health fair can easily take months of planning and use up your entire investment. For only a single day! Spread your resources and your budget over an entire year for better participation and impact. Health fairs can help if, and only if, your program is mature and includes other much more helpful components of health testing and follow-up on a regular basis. Learn more about HealthHammer™, the first and only Zero Trend Appraisal® by visiting Wellco's website.

When you focus on these 8 strategies for running a cost-effective health awareness program you are well on your way toward a healthier workforce and bottom line.

About Scott Foster and Wellco.

Scott Foster is President of Wellco. Wellco works with organizations who want to measurably improve health costs and conditions. Wellco specializes in health ROI systems, health risk appraisals, corporate wellness programs, speaking, and consulting. Wellco is the developer of the award winning HealthHammer™, the first and only Zero Trend Appraisal® system. For more information, visit www.welcocorp.com or call toll-free (866) 636-WELL (9355).



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