

Employee Health & Fitness™

The executive update on health improvement programs

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American Health Consultants® is
A Medical Economics Company

Technology, finance, flexibility guide vision of wellness 'futurists'

Planning processes seek entrenchment of wellness in corporate structure

[Editor's note: This is the second in a two-part series on wellness in the 21st century. See stories, pp. 14-20.]

Identifying the market forces and trends that will shape wellness in the next century is one thing. Crafting strategies for success in that new and challenging environment is quite another.

In our cover story last month, wellness experts from across the country pinpointed the key issues they see emerging beyond the year 2000. These issues include rapidly changing technology; continued tight budgets and smaller staffs; and a vastly changed role for the wellness professional — from employee to “internal consultant.”

On the following pages, a second group of health promotion professionals share the strategies they are implementing today to ensure future success. Not surprisingly, they address many of these same issues.

One hospital wellness manager is harnessing the power of the Internet and multi-media technology to create a learning center that will help employees gain the knowledge they need for more effective self-care and disease management.

Another wellness manager, a health and productivity leader, is crafting a long-range strategic plan that will weave her efforts into each of her company's departments. Another is going back to school to become an expert in complementary medicine so she will be better positioned for success — with or without her current employer.

Each professional tells a different story. Each one contains unique insights we hope you will find valuable as you make your own plans for the future. We're anxious to have *your* reactions to these articles; once you've read them, let us know what you think. And if you're involved in your own wellness “futurism,” we want to hear about it. Maybe your program will be featured on these pages in a future issue.

We believe the future for wellness is extremely exciting, and the possibilities virtually limitless. Once you've read the following reports, we hope you'll agree. ■

Expanding on 'wellness' paves path to future

Her title alone tells you something different is happening at Allied Signal. **Pam Witting**, MA, MSW, the newly named health and productivity leader, is charged with "looking at everything in the company that has to do with health and productivity." Witting works out of the Phoenix site of Morristown, NJ-based Allied Signal, a global aerospace and automotive chemical company. The firm employs 10,000 workers in three business units in the Phoenix area.

"We're expanding the word 'wellness,'" she adds. "This is the next thing in health promotion. The company is looking more at how we do in terms of health impacts on overall productivity.

"They see me as a leader in figuring that out," Witting continues. "The challenge given to me is to establish strategic goals and objectives, and measure the success of those goals and objectives on productivity and dollars avoided or saved."

With upper management officially approving the importance of having healthy, productive employees, Witting began work on a long-range plan that will seek positive outcomes in the next three to five years. She began by setting up a cross-functional team, "aligning, strategizing, and visioning." Her team includes safety leaders, people from benefits, the medical department, wellness, employee communications, and human resources.

Admittedly a "work in progress," the plan already includes an overall mission — to help Allied Signal in the reduction of direct and indirect costs related to disease and injury — and these major goals:

- to assist Allied Signal in increasing productivity savings through an integrated absence management program (short- and long-term disability, workers' comp, and Family Medical Leave Act process management);

- to become the benchmark medical facility for Allied (the Phoenix division has four medical clinics);

- to improve Allied Signal associate satisfaction through a high standard of "customer" service — service, that is, to the associates themselves.

"We want to create easier access to our two wellness centers and four health centers," Witting explains. "If you don't have good access to health services, people aren't going to use them. That links back directly to productivity." The plan is further refined into what Witting calls "overarching strategies." For each of these strategies, several "action steps" have been or will be identified. Here are some:

1. Overarching Strategy: Preventive Management. This is aimed at the early identification of individuals who are at risk for disease and/or injury, either physical or mental. The purpose of this strategy is to educate associates on appropriate use of the health care system and to improve customer satisfaction.

Action steps for the strategy include:

- Develop an HRA (Health Risk Appraisal) program with the purpose of early disease injury detection and identification of those individuals at risk for disease and/or injury.

- Provide a personal training program for associates that will reduce and maintain low-risk status. Allied dubbed this program "Reach Your Peak."

- Increase participation in existing health education classes and workshops through marketing and creating easy access. Among the keys to easy access, says Witting, is a structure of integrated services among all major departments. "Another key is a 1-800 number we provide that associates can use for virtually anything that happens in their lives — from elder care, to the colors of lipstick they can find in the city they're in, to finding a lost parent."

2. Overarching Strategy: Disease Management. This is the next stage of the wellness continuum, designed to minimize the impact of risk factors that

COMING IN FUTURE MONTHS

■ Mail, telephone preventive intervention help combat job strain

■ Diabetes management program cuts employee hospital stays in half

■ Deskercise eases the impact of work on overused body parts

■ Why do so many wellness efforts fall short of their potential?

■ New maintenance and reinforcement back program ensures ongoing effectiveness

have already been identified. It is designed to target those having the greatest impact on the Allied Signal employee population.

Action steps:

- Provide a work conditioning program for those associates with acute and/or chronic cardiovascular or orthopedic problems.
- To establish a follow-up process for associates with three or more risk factors in partnership with health plans.

3. Overarching Strategy: Total Quality Management. This is aimed at not only linking health and productivity, but at positively impacting overall quality at Allied Signal through the implementation of wellness-based strategies.

Action steps:

- Develop a “6 Sigma” measurement system Allied chose to measure the impact of the health

and productivity strategies on medical costs.

- Achieve a world-class rating for customer satisfaction.

Having previously been with such forward-thinking companies as Coors and Steelcase, Witting is comfortable in this leading-edge wellness environment. She’s also convinced that this is the direction in which her colleagues should head to ensure their future growth and success.

“Allied sees my role as more than just that of a wellness director,” she notes. “I would think if we want to progress in this field we need to think along these lines.”

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This wellness professional is looking out for No. 1

They didn’t need to draw *her* a picture. When Baptist/St. Vincent’s Health System in Jacksonville, FL, dissolved its wellness center in September 1998, **Lynda M. Steele**, MS, decided it was every woman for herself.

“I decided to go back to school to better position myself professionally,” she recalls. “The organization says it believes in wellness, but the steps they have taken to that end have not been as forthcoming as I had hoped they would be.”

Her current position as group leader has her writing reports for a team of individuals in charge of measurement and evaluation. Her former wellness staff has also been reassigned. “I believe they value my expertise in wellness, but they’re not quite sure where they want to go,” she says.

Steele, on the other hand, knows exactly where she wants to go. She is taking three different avenues to what she believes is a bright future — with or without her current employer. She began an eight-month program in a local massage therapy school in October.

She also is studying to earn her LMHC — a master’s degree as a licensed mental health counselor. As if that weren’t enough to keep her busy, she is attending Barbara Brennan’s School of Healing, taking a four-year certification program on healing through the human energy field. “It’s similar to therapeutic touch,” she explains.

Why these three simultaneous pursuits?

“I want to put all three of them together,” Steele says. “The typical massage therapy client goes in and says, ‘I hurt here,’ and the therapist tries to relieve the pain. I’ve had a lot of massage therapy myself, and I realize the emotions are held in the body. I knew I had issues that needed to be resolved — and without counseling, I would have had tight muscles again.”

Her timing may have been perfect; the hospital is now looking at what it calls “Complimentary alternative medicine.” Shortly after Steele began her studies, they asked her to work on a special project in this new area. “It looks like they may want to transition me out of this [area I’m in] and help them set this new system up,” she says.

However, Steele is not sure where she’ll be in five years. “I have no idea how it will work out, but my feeling is I have to take care of myself. I no longer have the belief that my employer is going to take care of me,” she asserts.

It’s even possible she might open up her own practice. “If it turns out they want to avail themselves of my services, great. If not, I can go out and start my own practice,” she explains. “I’ve realized I will not be victim any longer; I’m going to make my own fate. Even if they said they wanted to make me director or this new center, I might say my schooling has got to come first.”

[For more information, contact: Lynda Steele, Baptist/St. Vincent’s Health System, 1325 San Marco Blvd., Suite 502, Jacksonville, FL 32207. Telephone: (904) 202-5147.] ■

A place where employees can help themselves

Self-care as disease management

Susan B. Frampton, PhD, knows how important technology will be for health promotion in the 21st century. She also believes that self-care will take an increasingly prominent role in disease management. Recognizing the significance of these two trends, she has decided to wed the two with the creation of a health learning center at St. Francis Medical Center in Hartford, CT, where she serves as director of health promotion.

“By giving people access to the information they need, they can optimize their own health — as well as that of their family.”

The center, which will open this month, is located within the medical center in a high-traffic area. “It will be a huge room — in a lot of ways it will feel like a public area,” Frampton explains. It will contain a large main area with a help desk and offices behind it; four computer workstations (computers and printers, all with Internet access and CD-ROM drives); two TV/VCR stations, one designed for the site-impaired reader; its own collection of videos and CD-ROMs; and a children’s information area. It will be staffed with a librarian who can help visitors conduct their searches.

The start-up funding for the center was raised through The Miracles Benefit, a program St. Francis runs every year to target specific needs. “They raised over \$300,000, which was donated to help cover the costs of renovation, computer equipment, the collection of books and periodicals, and so forth,” says Frampton.

The center will serve the hospital’s employees, patients, families, and the community at large. “This is in keeping with the trends we see in this country, where consumers — and patients in particular — are looking for more information on how to stay well and how to manage their own disease when they are diagnosed,” she explains. “They are beginning to demand more of a partnership with

their health care providers, and choosing how their treatment should proceed. It’s all part of the move to self-care.”

Frampton sees the center as an adjunct for her employee health education programs. “It will include a state-of-the-art, comprehensive, multimedia resource collection,” she says. “It will include the latest books on health and wellness, and some very special electronic information services we are linked into.”

Going on line

These Internet-based services will allow employees and others to go on-line, click on to any health-related topic and get all the latest literature — and print it out in full text. The service Frampton has subscribed to is called Info-Trac.

“The other one [we’ve subscribed to] that’s really neat is called Alt-health watch, which contains all of the periodicals and journals on complementary medicine,” she says. Here, too, the user can pull up information by topic and print it out in full text.

Frampton says you can pay between \$6,000 and \$9,000 per year to subscribe to services like Info-Trac, while Alt health watch is much more reasonable: A fee of about \$1,500 buys access for for two to three computers.

Getting educated

Frampton is also creating new education programs to support the center, on topics like using the Internet and how to research your own illness. “By giving people access to the information they need, they can optimize their own health — as well as that of their family,” she explains.

Frampton believes that corporations should also consider instituting such learning centers. “I can see companies using it as a medical cost-containment strategy,” she says “If you are directly promoting self-care and empowering informed people to take care of themselves and stay well, there should be a corresponding impact on health care utilization,” she says.

[For more information, contact: Susan Frampton, Department of Health Promotion, St. Francis Medical Center, 95 Woodland Street, Hartford, CT 06105. Telephone: (860) 714-6580. E-mail: sframpto@stfranciscare.org.] ■

Searching for elusive wellness connection

The pioneer wellness research team is at it again. Grand Rapids, MI-based Steelcase Inc. and the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, are out to prove that wellness actually *does* impact productivity.

"We want to measure the impact that health and wellness have on one's effectiveness at work," explains **Bob Paige**, manager of Steelcase medical facilities and employee wellness. "We think there's a correlation, but there aren't a lot of studies out there that prove there is."

The pilot program, which began Jan. 1, involves a group of 100 employees. The university will participate in the research through both its wellness and business departments. "We're looking to them to help us better measure the productivity side of the house," Paige explains.

Breaking down the barriers

The premise of the study is if the barriers to exercise are eliminated, employees will exercise more, be healthier (i.e. better blood flow and oxygenation), have higher self-esteem, and be more productive as a result. The employees in the study will be empowered to exercise more often, says Paige. For example, if an employee is going to be traveling soon and his or her child is participating in a school play during the regular exercise time, the employee will most likely choose to go to the play because they won't see their child for a couple of days.

"We will tell them, yes, by all means get to the event, but be sure to do both. For example, if you're in a job that is flexible and not task-oriented, and your day is open at 9 a.m., schedule that meeting with yourself and go exercise. Just because it is during your typical work hours, you don't need to feel guilty about working out," he says.

For employees whose schedules aren't quite as flexible, the researchers will create the opportunity for them to be reimbursed up to \$500 a year for activities they do to exercise. Those opportunities, Paige says, will not be limited to traditional ones like fitness center membership reimbursement.

"Say you're a runner. Maybe we will reimburse you for running shoes," Paige explains. "Or if you purchase a treadmill and document home

usage, we could reimburse you for that."

The researchers ask two things of the participants: To participate in a Health Risk Appraisal (HRA) so they can measure biometrics, document their daily nutrition, level of exercise, and how much rest they get. To facilitate this, they created a Web page where the participant can sign on and click the appropriate information box, such as the type of exercise they have done. "It's extremely user-friendly," says Paige.

Finally, each of the participants has been assigned a health coach to help them with their exercise programs.

Getting feedback

Their productivity will be measured in part through the Steelcase human resource information system. "We'll obtain feedback on their performance by identifying the people they work with," says Paige. "The participants will give their own perspective and we'll compare to that with how others see them."

A more scientific measurement will be provided with the help of the University of Michigan's Robert Quinn, PhD, of the business college. (The health promotion center's Dee Edington, PhD, will also be participating, as he has on several landmark Steelcase studies).

"Bob Quinn wrote the book *Beyond Rational Management*," notes Paige. "In it, he developed an instrument that plots and measures effectiveness. We hope to be able take our own instrument we use to measure effectiveness and communicate the aggregate information."

Quinn's system, he explains, plots skill sets such as "commitment and morale," or "direction and clarity." The skill set findings for each participant will be compared to the mean Steelcase human resource professionals look for in that specific position.

While the HRA will be conducted only once or twice during the two-year study, "we may do [the effectiveness measurement] three or four times," says Paige.

He believes the study will help strengthen the bottom line connection for wellness. "We think wellness has an equation to productivity, and we definitely think there's a financial advantage as well."

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Integrated team seeks speed, decisiveness

Seeking to link its future efforts more closely to the corporate mission, the health promotion professionals at Tacoma, WA-based paper products company Weyerhaeuser are embarking on a major initiative to develop an “integrated priority health issues management approach” to health promotion and disease prevention.

“We’re looking to leverage our internal and external resources to the key issues in our company, and make an impact where it matters most,” explains **Mary Merten**, MA, health promotion coordinator. “Bottom-line issues are hot; we need to be viewed and measured more in a business fashion.” She and her strategic team (which also includes the medical director and several nurses) are seeking upper-management sponsorship for a cross-departmental team.

Causes for optimism

Merten is optimistic for a number of reasons. First, their vision supports the corporate mission of “speed, simplicity, and decisiveness.” Her department, formerly called “Wellness,” is now Occupational Medicine and Wellness, and is transitioning to Occupational Health and Wellness. This reflects a change in the way management views health and occupational wellness. “Those people in occupational health work on an entire continuum — from prevention and health promotion through medical care to disability management and disease management,” she explains.

Merten envisions a partnership between her department and other internal departments, as well as the company’s third-party administrator.

“Eventually this will impact sites all over Weyerhaeuser, and hopefully will lead to stronger partnerships with providers,” she says.

Internally, links between efforts in wellness and health promotion, employee benefits and workers’ comp will all be enhanced. This team, Merten further explains, will “define the scope, customer, measures, and overall strategies for implementing an integrated health management approach to a priority health issue.”

After benchmarking other companies, Merten’s “Priority Health Issues” team already has identified one critical issue: insurance data.

“We’ve run across a barrier on getting insurance

data because we have way too many plans,” she explains, noting this structure runs counter to the corporate mandate of “speed, simplicity and decisiveness.” In fact, she says, “employee benefits is trying to get the mills and plants to reduce the total number of plans.”

Once the initiative has been approved, the key players will examine the refined (they hope) insurance data, and identify the priority health issues at Weyerhaeuser. “Right now, our current team has tentatively identified nine; but to me, nine doesn’t say ‘priorities,’ she says. “After we review the other data, I’d like to see no more than probably two a year, if not one. We’re going to look at where to get the biggest bang for [the] buck. I can encourage and empower our staff; give them the tools to do just so much, and they do a lot as it is.” Seeing themselves as part of a larger corporate vision will help motivate them, she adds.

Once an integrated health management approach to a priority issue has been developed, specific strategies, resources, and time lines will be presented to company leaders for implementation.

Merten explains how such a program might work. “Let’s say the priority issue is back pain. In health promotion, we would develop ‘Priority Health Kits’ around back health. Working off the stages of change model, it would give our coordinators materials for employees to help them assess their own stage, and provide tools for each stage.”

In this integrated system, all departments would communicate closely. When a call comes in to workers’ comp about a back injury, for instance, that unit is required to develop a return to work program. It not only will alert the employee’s physician, but the occupational health and wellness department as well. “My group might be able to provide additional motivational literature, stretches, and so forth, to complement what the employee receives from the physician,” she says.

Employee benefits will be responsible for more than just providing the data. “They sponsor our nurse lines and deliver literature as well,” Merten explains.

Will the fact that her plan is in line with the corporate vision help win the backing she seeks? “Absolutely,” she says. “It is a targeted, focused, measurement-oriented plan, and so far, it is being pretty well received.”

[For more details, contact: Mary Merten, Weyerhaeuser, MS WWC1E3, P.O. Box 2999 Tacoma, WA 98477. Telephone: (253) 924-6311. E-mail mertenm@wdni.com.] ■

Targeted tests screen for 'job happiness'

A new preventive anti-stress technique?

If we could accurately predict whether a prospective employee would be happy in a specific job, we might avoid untold emotional and financial pain. According to one expert, we already have the tools to do just that.

"The more employees are matched up with the requirements of the job and vice versa, the more healthy they will be," asserts **Robert Edenborough**, PhD. Edenborough is a managing consultant with ASE-Consulting Group, part of the occupational division of London-based test publisher NFER-NELSON. He also is author of *Using Psychometrics: A Practical Guide to Testing and Assessment*. Psychometrics means, quite simply, mental measurement.

"Psychometrics seeks to understand aspects of mental functioning that have an impact on behavior and performance," he explains. "For example, attention to details might show up as accuracy in your work."

A good mental fit is critical to job satisfaction, he notes. "Employees tend to feel stressed if you ask them to do things they can't do. I personally have poor spatial ability. If I have work that requires me to find my way about, or to assemble things, I find it very hard, which also makes me very impatient."

Exactly how does psychometrics measure mental job suitability? "In effect, by replicating part of the job — like solving a particular problem," says Edenborough. "In other cases, you look at people's fundamental aptitudes, approaches — their ways of looking at other people. If they are inclined to be sociable, they will tend to describe themselves to you as such, and that would be relevant for teamwork, or working with the public."

A sample question set would begin with a basic

one, such as, "I like handling figures," posed as a true/false choice or on a scale of one to five. "This simple response would tell you directly how comfortable the employee would be with anything from keeping petty cash to managing corporate accounts," he says. "It may seem naive on its own, but people do tend to tell the truth."

After that initial response, the testing can become more complex. "You can then ask, 'Which is most true of you?' and add any number of variables — visiting with people in the office, whether you like your workplace neat and tidy, and so on," he says. "As you pair and re-pair the responses, you get a much better idea of the individual's mental aptitudes."

Investment can be modest

Instituting psychometric testing does not have to be expensive, says Edenborough. "If you're talking about high-volume recruitment using one or two simple ability measures, it may only cost a few dollars per head. If you were conducting an assessment for the CEO of a Fortune 500 company, a consultant could charge up to \$4,000." In choosing an individual or company to conduct the testing, consult an industrial psychologist. "There are a number of companies that publish tests and tend to give advice, training or consulting services," he adds. "Be sure to also check references and formal affiliations."

You also should consult with your legal department. "There have been some legal challenges in the United States, mostly centered on the relevance of the content of the tests," he says. "So be sure to check with legal in terms of the design of the test and the relevant norms groups. The acid test has always been, 'is the content defensible?'"

The bottom line, says Edenborough, is this type of testing can be well worth the time and expense. "With unhappy and inefficient employees — and these go hand in hand — you definitely have increased absence and increased staff turnover. After all, some people may take a job they know they won't enjoy just because they really need it. Traditional interviewing doesn't tend to catch that." **(CIGNA Corporation developed an interviewing method that falls somewhere between traditional interviewing and formal mental aptitude testing. See box, p. 20.)**

[For details, contact: Robert Edenborough, ASE, Hanover House, 2-4 Sheet St., Windsor, Berkshire SL4 1BG, England. Telephone: 011 44 175 3850 333.] ■

KEY POINTS

- Poor job 'fit' can have significant impact on employee stress levels.
- Psychometric testing, even for entire work force, can be relatively inexpensive.
- Unhappiness and inefficiency on the job go hand in hand.

Behavioral interviews take guesswork out of hiring

Mark Jacobs wants to rely on more than reference checking, a review of credentials, and “good vibes” when he interviews prospective employees at the Bloomfield, CT, campus of CIGNA Corporation.

“Say a person is interviewing for a position in which they will have to make decisions that will directly affect the corporation’s bottom line,” says the assistant vice president of corporate staffing. “The wrong choice on our part can affect us financially — not only in terms of poor decisions, but if there is a bad fit it will also affect us in terms of time off.”

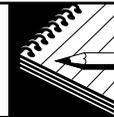
Jacobs sees a clear link between what he calls “behavioral interviewing” and the likely health of the employee. “If you describe a job as a stressful job, some interviewees might be discouraged, while others would say, ‘I don’t consider that stress, I consider it a challenge; it’s the kind of thing that makes my day go fast.’ We’re all different, and those are the kinds of differences we’re looking for.”

The basic premise of behavioral interviewing, he explains, is that past behavior is a best predictor of future behavior. This type of interviewing helps identify a person’s behaviors in a particular business environment or area. “We’re not trying to play psychologist,” he says. “I’ll ask questions like: ‘Tell me a time when you had to deal with an irate manager. . . . What did you do?’ Then, I might ask what happened that made them irate; how they responded; and how it turned out. Or, I might ask how they deal with stress, or what they have done to provide excellent customer service.”

Above all, Jacobs favors behavioral interviewing because it is consistent. “We ask everybody the same or similar questions so we can evaluate each of them in the same way,” he explains. “It’s also more professional; how an employee looks, for example, is not as important as how he feels about certain situations and how he reacts to them.”

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GUEST COLUMN



Healthy approach to retain intellectual capital

By Lewis Schiffman

Whether you are sitting in a boardroom or attending a conference with human resource managers, these two topics are frequently discussed: “How can we attract and retain good people?” and “Why don’t employees have any loyalty to their company?”

The more enlightened leaders also are asking: “What can we do to make it attractive for employees to invest themselves in the success of this company?”

The more enlightened wellness professional is asking: “How can I position myself to be part of the solution?”

Before exploring solutions, however, perhaps we should consider the full scope of the problem. Employees have learned painfully through downsizing (euphemistically referred to as “right-sizing”), acquisitions, and re-engineering that company leaders and shareholders have little loyalty to employees. The employee of the ‘90s has also been asked to work longer, harder, faster, flow with change, and help their organization stay ahead in a competitive marketplace.

Consequently, they have discovered — as well as having been advised by change management experts — that all of us need to operate as entrepreneurs, and each employee must continually market “You Inc.” because there is no job security. With these experiences as reference points, it is no surprise an employee will leave his present employer for stock options, increased salary, a more casual dress code, or 50 cents more per hour.

The cost of losing a good employee is often greater than we realize. **Jim Campbell** in the People Performance and Rewards Practice office of management consulting firm Towers Perrin Inc. in Atlanta says it takes one to two times a professional employee’s annual salary to search, hire, and retrain a new employee. Once hired, it could take several months before they make a meaningful contribution to the organization. In the case of information technology workers, added costs may

be incurred by having to hire contract employees to fill an immediate need by the loss of proprietary business knowledge.

Additionally, there is a loss of continuity in customer service, which could result in loss of customer loyalty. Loss of a good employee also affects the morale of remaining employees, who begin to wonder, "Is there a better opportunity for me out there?" They may also entertain thoughts such as, "Why should I give my all to a company that isn't paying me as well as XYZ Info Systems?"

More than money

Fortunately, an extensive body of research indicates most employees — and particularly "Generation X-ers" — are motivated by more than money. They want challenge, autonomy, a chance to be creative, and want their job to be *fun*. All generations from all cultures will respond positively to visible demonstrations that they are cared about, valued, and respected. Include them in important decisions, and they will feel less vulnerable to job insecurity.

For the wellness consultant (both internal and external), the challenge of retaining "intellectual capital" offers us an opportunity to reposition our services in the organization. We can enhance our value to our clients (and our job security) by developing and implementing strategies that make it more desirable to work in a particular organization.

Let's begin by assessing needs. Our client, or employer, actually wants to do more than attract and retain the best and the brightest. The intelligent employer wants leadership, passion, creativity, and a commitment to exceptional customer service. However, before proposing any strategy, find out if they are willing to invest time and money in solving the problem.

If you get top-level buy-in, form an employee advisory group who can help determine what approaches will increase employee motivation. Be mindful that the associates' reality is there is no job security nor company loyalty to the employee.

Be willing to think outside the box — outside your traditional role — as you search for solutions. For example: Walking, running, or biking "across America" to win T-shirts or premiums may be fine for the 20% to 25% of the population who are committed exercisers, but you may reach the other 75% to 80% with programs like "How to

Create More Balance in Your Life," "How to Simplify Your Life," "Effective Parenting Skills," "Money Management," "Self-Esteem," or "Vacation Travel on a Budget."

Look at the office environment. Is it comfortable? Inviting? Does it minimize stress? Does it encourage individual expression and creativity?

Air quality, lighting, and water also affect attitude, energy level, the ability to think and comfort level. Full-spectrum lighting (as opposed to standard fluorescent lighting) reduces vulnerability to stress and depression — and it also reduces power bills. Putting in water filters and encouraging water consumption, as opposed to caffeine, also creates a more calm environment and sustained energy.

Management style also has a tremendous impact on employee motivation, loyalty, and the work environment. Accordingly, supervisors need to be reminded to "catch people doing something right." Give recognition for achievement. Ask for input in decision making so people have a sense of project and company ownership. Encourage people to present new ideas and approaches. Supervisors should treat each positive suggestion as a gift, and recognize the effort the associate made to improve the organization.

Discussing supervision

As a wellness professional, you probably won't be conducting the supervisory training yourself. However, you can discuss the impact supervision has on the work environment with the training or human resource departments. You can also look for ways to reinforce the skills managers learn from these training programs. If you examine this area in your company carefully, you will be shocked by the number of managers and supervisors who have poor people skills and alienate employees.

As we enter the new millennium, the demand and war for talent will significantly escalate. If you can help your company create an environment where people are stimulated, feel cared about, and enjoy coming to work, your company will prosper. More important for you, your company will view your work as having a direct impact on the bottom line.

[Lewis Schiffman is a health and performance consultant, trainer, and president of Atlanta Health Systems. He can be reached at (404) 636-9437.] ■

Workplace allergies cost firms millions

Nearly nine in 10 workers are affected

They may not be as “sexy” as heart disease or diabetes, but allergies are costing U.S. employers millions of dollars a year, according to a recent survey. They’re more than a mere nuisance for employees, according to respondents; they significantly affect health and performance in the workplace.

The survey, conducted by Lincolnshire, IL-based Hewitt Associates LLC, a management consulting firm specializing in human resource solutions, incorporated responses from 2,039 employees at more than 30 large employers. According to the study, increased absenteeism and reduced productivity as a result of allergies may have cost U.S. companies over \$250 million in 1998. Other survey findings include the following:

- 88% of respondents said they suffer from allergies;
- 40% of employees who suffer from allergies say they miss an average of one to five days of work a year due to symptoms;
- 83% of survey respondents say they are not as effective at work due to allergy symptoms — on average, they estimate they are 26% less effective when affected by them;
- The average number of workdays employees report they’re affected by allergies during a year is 68.7.

Employees who use non-prescription medication say they most often miss work because of drowsiness, while those who use prescription medicine to alleviate their symptoms say they most often miss work because of planned doctor appointments.

“When you combine the cost of missed workdays with reduced productivity, we estimate that companies can lose an average of \$2,000 a year

per allergy sufferer,” says **Camille Haltom**, MS, a health care consultant with Hewitt. To calculate its figures, Hewitt began with a national average wage. Then, it extrapolated its numbers based on the self-reported responses. “When you factor in lost work time, productivity, and replacement costs, we estimate there are seven to 10 times more dollars at stake for lost productivity than for actual absenteeism,” Haltom explains.

She concludes the lost time and productivity figures are the survey’s most significant findings. “They are what represent the significant costs [of allergies], and yet they do not typically show up on most employers’ radar screens.” Allergies, she adds, typically affect people who otherwise may not be “high-cost” in terms health care. “But when they lose productivity, they *become* high-cost.”

Looking for a solution

Employers should pursue these key strategies to fight the impact of allergies in the workplace, says Haltom: Improve employee education and carefully evaluate your health plans. “Education is probably the No. 1 strategy. An educated population can accomplish a great deal in terms of avoiding allergens and/or managing their allergic conditions.”

If you don’t have an in-house health educator, you can partner with a local health care provider. “Quite often, area hospitals or local HMOs might offer work site education programs or printed materials,” she says.

Also, a number of pharmaceutical firms would be willing to partner with you in a disease management program,” she observes. Schering-Plough, Glaxo Wellcome, and Hoechst Marion Roussel all offer such programs, she says.

“Companies should also take a close look at their health plans and review what types of coverage they offer employees who are affected by allergies,” Haltom advises. “For those who need careful management of symptoms, there should be coverage for doctor visits — testing if needed — and prescription medication.”

This is more than just a health and productivity issue, she notes. “It could become a job satisfaction issue if employees become dissatisfied with the provider.”

[For more information, contact: Camille Haltom, Hewitt Associates LLC, 100 Half Day Road, Lincolnshire, IL 60069. Telephone: (847) 771-6887. Web site: www.hewitt.com.] ■

KEY POINTS

- Allergy sufferers are affected nearly 70 days out of the year.
- Productivity losses even greater threat than absenteeism.
- Education, review of health care policies are key strategies.

In drug testing, you get what you pay for

Are you missing 70% of possible positives?

There are several common errors employers make when implementing a “drug-free workplace program” — not the least of which is looking to save money on their testing procedures.

That can be a big mistake, warns **Wes Caldwell**, vice president of CHG subsidiary Health Management Group Ltd. (HMGL), and Vanguard Consulting, a wholly owned HMGL subsidiary located in Signal Mountain, TN. (CHG provides substance abuse policy, education, testing and liability insurance services; HMGL manages workplace drug abuse programs.)

“Most employers go out and buy a drug test as cheaply as they can get it; they’re more worried about convenience than anything else,” he says. “But many of those tests miss up to 70% of the true positives.”

Choosing the best test

In others words, Caldwell says, not all drug tests are created equal. How does an employer know which tests to select? The finest testing available is a “0 Tolerance” test. The term “0 Tolerance” was trademarked by Nashville, TN-based Aegis Laboratories.

“Aegis is the only laboratory certified ‘forensic’ by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA),” Caldwell says. (SAMHSA is a unit of the federal Department of Health). “The same batch of urine that produces a 2% positive rate under standard testing will produce a 10% rate under 0 tolerance.”

These kinds of tests are the most rigorous and expensive available. The next level of sensitivity is represented by those tests approved by the

KEY POINTS

- ‘Standard’ tests can let users slip through the cracks.
- Workers’ comp premium incentives for drug testing available in many states.
- Workplace drug program can significantly boost productivity.

College of American Pathologists Forensic Urine and Drug Testing. “There are only a few hundred of these,” says Caldwell.

Employers should not use a drug test that is not certified by one of these bodies, he stresses.

What do they cost? “Aegis testing is in the \$50 to \$70 range [per person],” he says. “Standard tests under SAMHSA may be in the \$25 to \$30 range.” Caldwell says it is well worth the investment. In fact, he asserts, “Wellness people need to look at substance abuse policies as the No. 1 health issue in the workplace.”

That’s not just because of the threat substance abuse poses to employee health, says Caldwell. An effective policy can mean huge dollar savings, depending on what state you’re in. “In Georgia, for example, you get a 7.5% premium credit on workers’ comp [if you have a drug-free work

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Editorial Questions

For questions or comments, call **Glen Harris** at (404) 262-5461.

place program], and in Ohio it's anywhere from 6% to 20%," he notes.

In all, 12 states have such incentive statutes, Caldwell says. "But this is just the 'chump change.' If your drug testing doesn't reduce your workers' comp claims by 50%, you're missing the boat. If you don't reduce your group health costs by 25%, you're missing the boat."

You should also see a quantum leap in productivity. Caldwell recalls the story of a Nashville company called PIZ, which began testing a couple of years ago. "At that time they had roughly 100 employees," he says. "About a year ago, the director of marketing at Aegis noticed the testing volume had dropped off, so he called PIZ to see what was going on."

Cause and effect

The reason testing had dropped off was because the company now employed only 50 people — despite the fact that business was up 10% to 20% a year. The reason for the work force reduction? Drug testing. "They can handle the same amount of business with half the people; they never realized what a drain on productivity the users were," Caldwell explains.

In summary, he says, there are four keys to an effective workplace drug abuse program:

1. You *have* to do drug testing.
2. You must have a written policy statement.
3. Employee education and training must be addressed.
4. You need a strategy for dealing with employees who test positive.

This final point is critical. "Dismissal is not a strategy," says Caldwell. "Not when you're perhaps talking about 15% to 20% of the work force."

Caldwell is not talking about a 30-day "miracle cure," either. "The employee has to undergo evaluation by a trained substance abuse counselor. Then, he must be monitored on a random basis for at least two years." In other words, he concludes, "there is no short-term answer."

[For more information, contact: Wes Caldwell, Vanguard Consulting, 2510 Dowler Circle, Signal Mountain, TN 37377. Telephone: (423) 842-8341. E-mail: VanguardatCDC.net. For more information, and studies on drug abuse in the workplace, visit the SAMHSA Web site at www.samhsa.gov.] ■

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