



Health Matters

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Choosing Health Care for All Corners of the Office

When it comes to your work force, most business leaders want the same thing: great employees in good health. But every employer knows that workers come with a range of talents – and a range of health conditions that may affect their performance on the job.

In previous columns we've discussed the variety of health promotion programs that are available to employers, whether they're looking to help their employees lose weight, quit smoking or get more exercise. But what is the best way to care for employees who may be dealing with chronic conditions such as diabetes, asthma or cardiovascular disease?

Across the country, the rising rates of chronic illness are contributing to increasing health-care costs. Health promotion programs can help bring those costs down over time by boosting productivity, reducing absenteeism and helping workers reach their healthy living goals. Recent media coverage has focused on companies that offer attractive incentives to employees who make health-related lifestyle changes or even penalize those who don't.

But there is more behind the headlines. Many health insurers also offer "care management" or "health management" programs for those facing more serious conditions that require more personalized support. This may include regular telephone calls, online tools, reminders for important medical appointments, and follow-up support after hospital visits.

Many insurers also are using claims data and the latest in predictive modeling software to automatically identify members with these conditions regardless of the severity of their symptoms. Based on their "predictive risk" scores, these members are grouped into low, moderate or acute categories, which determine the type and intensity of the care they will receive.

For example, a member who has diabetes that is under control may receive mailed reminders about health-care tests, while someone with a more severe case may receive monthly or even weekly phone calls from care managers about issues related to their illness. If an employee has

been in the hospital, a care manager may contact him or her within 48 hours of discharge to help deal with any issues, such as missed doctor's appointments or unfilled prescriptions. In some cases, home health care may be available.

The most successful initiatives engage the entire health-care community. Your health insurer may enlist a variety of caregivers to assist with employee needs such as case managers, pharmacists, behavioral health specialists and clinical account managers. This team collaborates with physicians and can alert them to problems and assist them with any treatment that may be needed.

Stay in tune with the needs of your employees. Your workers are diverse, and their health-care needs are too. ★

Good Health Goes "a la Carte" as Employers Choose from a Menu of Options

Employers today have a suite of wellness products from which to choose. When researching your options, look for a health promotion program that includes programs for the healthy and those dealing with chronic conditions. Options include:

- Educational tools such as periodic mailings
- Access to online tools and software geared toward those who are healthy and those with chronic conditions
- Health coaching services
- Weekly phone calls from a registered nurse
- Support for those discharged from the hospital
- Health promotion activities for those on the healthier end of the spectrum, which may include programs for tobacco cessation, weight management and physical activity
- Access to additional services such as an employee assistance program for behavioral health and workers' compensation

For more information on health promotion or care management programs, contact Michael Taylor at 412/454-7534 or visit upmchealthplan.com.