



Corporate Wellness: 2013 is Time for an Upgrade

Dan Elliott of Ralph Benefits in central New York meets with each employee and their spouse during benefits selection periods to explain their options. He has a nearly 100 percent client retention rate and close to 100 percent employer satisfaction rates.

Face-to-face time between a benefits consultant and employees may not seem like a wellness strategy, but it is one—if not the best—investment in engaging employees and their families in their benefits and their health. Elliott's approach is an important step in the right direction as we strive to help our corporate clients establish a culture of health within their organizations.

Corporate wellness initiatives have been around for 40 years, beginning in the early 1970s. The early wellness programs and those leading up to 2013 concentrated on tactical individual behavioral change. After four decades of programming, it is clear the results have been disappointing and, in fact, are stuck at a less-than-optimal position within nearly every organization. There is little to no evidence our population is healthier or more productive today than when the programs began.

However, what has emerged is a growing awareness of the potential of a healthy workforce. Corporate and political leaders have never been so interested in how good health can impact costs and productivity, making now an opportune time to bring wellness programs to a higher level of engagement. Realizing this opportunity is the responsibility of individuals who recommend wellness, health and disability benefit designs to organizations.

New and Progressive Strategies for 2013

Developing low-risk maintenance strategies illustrates the type of widespread, culture-based thinking that is critical as companies move toward the successful implementation of new, inspired approaches to helping individuals and the workplace thrive in a sustainable way. That opens the door to Elliott's approach to engaging employees in their health and benefits choices, which provides a major competitive edge even against less expensive programs.

An idea that will gain traction over the next few years is focusing on the financial wellness of employees. Simplicity Health Plan has developed a tool to help employees understand the financial implications of their health and benefits decisions in a compelling way. The company's handheld mobile and web-based applications assess an individual's health risks and behaviors, calculate the excess costs of any risks and demonstrate potential savings. Greg Hummer, M.D. and CEO states, "...the Health Index Calculator

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informs individuals of potential debilitating chronic disease that could rob them of their health and retirement security."

A financial tool for fully-insured companies was created and implemented by Chris Hogan and Scott Wood at the Benefit Commerce Group in Phoenix. Their "Trend Neutralizer" system was developed to show the 50-250 employee companies the role cost trend plays in the calculation of future costs. The need for this system arose from the inability of the carriers to provide the utilization cost data. The Trend Neutralizer provides the underwriter with the opportunity to retrospectively evaluate a client's performance in seven areas that all parties agree leads to better outcomes. If the client performs consistent with best practice, their trend factor may be reduced to zero. The carrier has none of the risks of a prospectively based pricing strategy; however, the carrier is able to reward the groups who are doing what the carrier wants them to do without having to subsidize the expenses for groups that are not in compliance.

Alan Wang at AFIS-Benefits, a benefits and wellness company in Emeryville, Calif., in considering the impact of PPACA to small businesses, came to the conclusion the employer will never be absolved of the responsibility to have a healthy workforce whether the employees get their insurance from the exchanges or through the employer. Regardless the employer will want to create a culture of health and provide other benefits to drive down costs and improve workplace effectiveness because the employer will have very little control to affect premium outcome in the exchanges. Purchasing insurance in the traditional sense will likely result in lower costs when the employer becomes engaged in promotion a culture of health.

"Good Health is Good Business" has always been our focus when working with clients says David Rearick and Stephen Cherniak at Marsh & McLennan Agency LLC in Atlanta.

We achieve that by assisting our clients with a focus on vision and environment. A vision from leadership that supports the principle that "good health is expected—not hoped for"; and an environment that focuses on and is supportive of the workforce's ability to do their job and manage their lifestyle.

Finally, today it isn't about wellness—it is about well-being. We need the objective data like biometrics; but a high blood pressure or BMI is often the result of an unhappy marriage, someone with an abuse problem, financial insecurity or mental illness—these are the root causes and human resource challenges that every health enhancement strategy must look for and address." **HC**