

More Wellness in the Workplace Principles

Courtesy of Wellsource

More principles for wellness in the workplace can be reviewed below.

Dr. Derek Lee

The 25th annual Wellness in the Workplace Conference by the University of Michigan Health Management Research Center directed by Dee W. Edington, PhD, was held on March 15, 2006. Conference participants were challenged to think outside of the box and consider complex systems rather than a set of individual risks or behaviors. Other key principles gleaned from that conference include:

Budgeting for wellness. One person asked Dr. Edington, "How much should you budget for a good wellness program that will get results (show savings)?" He answered \$400-\$500 per person. This is more than most companies spend but is an ideal goal for getting high participation and major lifestyle changes. By running your own wellness program in-house you can generally keep these costs much lower. The principle is to budget enough to run a comprehensive program that gets good results.

Wellness is free. A favorite saying of Dr. Edington was, "Healthcare (medical care) is costly! But wellness care is free." Comprehensive wellness programs show savings of \$3 or more for every dollar invested. Thus, wellness care is free – it even pays!

Track health trends. It's important to provide the HRA yearly. One HRA tells you where you are, in regard to health. Two or more HRAs tell you what direction you are going.

Controlling healthcare costs. "The only solution that works is to stop the increase of upward flow of people to high risk. The natural flow, if you do nothing, is people moving from low to high risk (and high cost)," Dr. Edington said.

"What you have to do is have people take control of their own lives – be in charge and be committed to making healthy choices. Don't tell people what to do – empower them to take control. Then assist them in making changes."

Furthermore, Dr. Edington advised, "Don't hire smokers and unhealthy people. Hire healthy people. Keep them healthy. Keep them employed for a long time."

Weight control. Weight control programs haven't worked for 20 years. We need to look at more effective solutions: help overweight people be more active; help them develop better eating habits; focus on not gaining any more weight and adopting healthier lifestyles. For example, in the General Motors study (by the UM), obese individuals who were regularly active cost \$450 less per year than obese individuals who didn't exercise.

High-cost risk clusters. Two of the highest cost risk groups in an organization are:

- Multiple psychological risk factors (high stress, low life satisfaction, depression)
- Metabolic syndrome (3 or more of the following risk factors: excess abdominal fat, moderately elevated glucose or blood pressure levels, high blood fat levels, low HDL levels)

Tools for change.

- Benefit design. Design benefits so people will want to participate in the wellness program. Make a large price differential between benefits that do not include participation in wellness and those that do.
- Incentives. Be creative. Rewards and recognition are powerful motivators.
- Modeling. Management (top down) should model wellness and the value the company puts on a healthy workforce.
- Change the organization's environment. Make wellness part of the organization's mission – healthy employees are productive employees.

Favorite Dee Edington Quotes

"You don't save costs by trying to save costs –
but by helping people maintain high health status and being good health consumers."

"My goal is healthy employees in healthy families, in healthy companies, in healthy communities!"

"Healthy employees are productive employees. A healthy workforce is a competitive advantage."

"Do disease management because it is the right thing to do – not to save money."

"High healthcare costs are damaging corporate America.

Worksite wellness needs to be integrated into business soon.

We can't afford to wait. We have to do it right.

We need to change the work environment – then people change."

Reference: Edington D. Wellness in the Workplace Conference. Beyond Individual Risks and Behaviors. Health Management Research Center. March 15, 2006.