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The Power of Prevention

With disease management, employers reap rewards of reduced health care costs.

The goals of any disease management program are as straightforward as they are ambitious.

Early identification of a serious health problem, such as diabetes, hypertension or heart disease, allows an interdisciplinary team of health care professionals to slow its progress or prevent complications, improve quality of life and work toward a better outcome.

At the center of this team are patients. After all, it is the patients who ultimately must take responsibility and make healthier choices in their daily lives.

Any successful disease management program should be well-rounded enough to provide counseling for all aspects of a patient's condition – including education and ongoing motivation to help patients reach their goals.

Identifying barriers to compliance is also important, and those barriers can be different for people with the same condition.

Many companies implement disease management programs quickly and merely as a means towards reducing health care costs.

When implementing a disease management program, educational materials are extremely important, and employing them effectively is key to the program's success. But a slick brochure isn't enough to fully educate employees and make them feel comfortable with what's to come.

Building out time, well in advance of implementing a program, to communicate with employees through e-mail, printed materials and onsite question-and-answer periods will contribute to the success of the program and encourage a higher rate of participation.

Employers must understand why certain employees may resent or mistrust intrusions into what they feel are their own personal decisions. In particular, employees in lower-compensation brackets may have a longer-standing cynicism about any "new" program from their employer.



By Larry Luter

If you're implementing a disease management program, it is important to explain HIPAA and reiterate that health care information is entirely private. Highlighting this point will make employees feel more at ease with the program and increase participation levels.

The benefits of any disease management program must be made clear to every employee.

By reducing health care costs across the company, the rising costs of individual contributions can be contained. Understanding employees, and addressing their health issues early is paramount for wellness and disease management.

Perhaps the most important benefit of a disease management program is the ability to put aside political correctness when discussing health issues.

Most employers are not at all motivated to discuss obesity with their employees, even if that obesity results in lower productivity or higher health care costs. If employers cannot state the reality of a health condition, though, how can they effectively provide health management tools to address the condition?

Employers who use wellness and disease management programs gain not only medical expertise, but an objective, outside opinion. By putting the onus for blunt health care discussions on a third party, the employer no longer has to be the bad guy. While the health management vendor starts the conversation, prescribes lifestyle changes and monitors progress, the employer reaps the rewards of reduced health care costs.

By detecting chronic conditions early, employers can work with disease management vendors to guide employees to choices for better health.

Employees benefit because they get help sticking with those choices through targeted and ongoing education and motivation.

To reach these goals, employers must first strive to understand what keeps employees from leading healthier lives – and why they may be reluctant to seek regular medical care.

When these barriers are understood and overcome, the power of prevention truly works to an employer's benefit.

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