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## Implementing Wellness in the Workplace

### Considerations before you get the ball rolling



Encouraging employees to make lifestyle changes that foster good health pays off. The key to success lies in the process used to design and implement wellness programs. To manage this process effectively, employers must understand the steps involved and why they are important to the overall program.

Wellness programs can be broken down into three critical components: selling the concept to senior management and employees; designing and initiating the program; and measuring the outcomes.

It is easy to say that getting a chief executive officer's support is the most important step. While it is crucial - and without it you may never have a program - support needs to be widespread throughout the organization. The best way to gain this support is with a solid business case. It should include:

- 1 **Group health benefit reports** - Extended health benefit reports, short-term and long-term disability, sick leave and incidental absenteeism information as well as worker's compensation claims are all important.
- 2 **Direct and indirect health costs** - With the help of the accounting department, create a list of expenses that are directly associated with employee health (ie. Absenteeism) and a list of those indirectly linked to it (ie. Replacement workers). Involving the finance department will help others understand current health costs and the need to reduce them.
- 3 **Existing initiatives** - Demonstrate how the program will fit into the organization. List initiatives that will support the program, such as a fitness subsidy, and confront any issues that seem to clash with the ideology of the program.
- 4 **Corporate culture** - Gather written and informal information about the culture of the organization to help determine how it can be aligned with business goals as well as how to deliver the business case.

To contain costs, the organization needs to improve its employee's health. Organizations comprised predominantly of baby boomers or older workers likely have a more immediate need for a wellness program. But, there are also valid arguments for implementing a wellness

program for a younger population. These programs are proactive. It is most effective to implement a program while employees are young and healthy instead of waiting until benefit costs start to climb. Each organization has its own special needs. There may be a disproportionate number of smokers, stress levels may be high due to increased home and/or work-life obligations, employee absenteeism and prescription drug costs are above the norm, or projects may not be coming in on budget or on time.

Whatever the reason, it is necessary to identify and address these issues in the business case so that they don't become a reason for not implementing a program. Employees will want to know what the program will offer, what it will look like to them, its expected outcomes and how the information such as a health questionnaire will be used. If prescription drug costs and absenteeism are high, tell employees. Employees need to know that other alternatives such as managed drug formularies and attendance management were considered, but a wellness program was chosen instead.

So, why wouldn't an organization do this? The number one reason cited is 'lack of money'. The excuse is questionable, however, when a solid business case demonstrates that programs can return \$2 to \$4 for every dollar invested. Research also shows that the investment is actually short-term as programs are likely to start paying for themselves before the end of the third year. If you anticipate that budgeting will be an issue, it is important to be thorough with your business case. Involve departments such as finance, occupational health and safety, and the management committee. Forecast increased costs that would occur without the program and demonstrate the savings that can be reaped by implementing one.

Here are some questions and answers asked of a senior executive as to why they implemented a wellness program...

*Why did you start a wellness program?*

"Our big issue was staff recruitment and retention. Because of funding cutbacks, our staff was carrying a

continued on reverse...

## Wellness Programs..., cont'd

large workload and burnout was an important issue for us to address. Our corporate vice-presidents were all facing the challenge of helping employees deal with stress."

*What would it take to get your buy-in for a well-ness program?*

"I would want to see clear outcomes - data linking wellness programs to the resulting benefits. I would also want to see information on benchmarks to measure the success of the program."

*Are there any barriers to hiring a consultant for the job?*

"In the public sector, there are always barriers to hiring consultants. We are using the taxpayers' dollars and have to answer to a lot of people. That's why we need the data to make the case. There is also the philosophical question of how much responsibility the employer has for the employee's health. Employees need to be seen as taking some personal responsibility for this to be sure, but we recognized that if we were going to better manage our benefit costs, improve attendance, and attract and retain employees, a change needed to be made. For us it was a wellness program."

To get a wellness program off the ground you will need to establish a wellness committee to drive the effort. Participation will be higher if employees feel that the program is for them, and to some degree of their own making. Look for employees who have experienced the benefits of healthy living first-hand, and make them champions of the cause. Some employees will be skeptical about the intentions of the program and think it is merely for the benefit of the employer. Help employees to clearly understand the program's goals and the benefits that they will receive. Employees will answer a confidential lifestyle questionnaire if the purpose is disclosed up front, and if they know what the program will offer, what it will look like to them, its expected outcomes and how their information will be used.

In the end, the benefit of a wellness program will be to increase employee energy levels, improve their productivity, give them greater satisfaction with everything around them, and who knows, it may even allow them to be around a little while longer to enjoy life. Not a bad outcome from where I sit - I mean stand.

Until next time...

## Assistive Devices Program

### Insulin Pumps and Supplies

*The following changes to the Ontario Assistive Devices Program were announced by the Ministry November 14, 2006 and are retroactive to April 1, 2006.*

What kind of insulin pumps and supplies are covered through the Assistive Devices Program (ADP)?

ADP helps pay for insulin pumps and will provide a grant to help pay for insulin pump related supplies.

#### Who can apply?

Any permanent resident of Ontario who has a valid Health Card, is 18 years of age or under and meets the established eligibility criteria.

#### How can I apply to ADP?

You must contact one of the 34 pediatric diabetes programs that are part of the Ontario Pediatric Diabetes Programs (NOPDP) located in Ontario.

Each program consists of a multidisciplinary team of health professionals which will determine eligibility and assist you in completing the application form.

#### What eligibility criteria do I have to meet?

You may be eligible for ADP funding if you are not having success with multiple daily insulin injections and are willing and able to use an insulin pump. Included in the established eligibility criteria are the requirements to have demonstrated to your pediatric diabetes assessment team an ongoing commitment to blood glucose monitoring, the safe and appropriate use of the insulin pump, participation in insulin pump education programs and regular diabetes clinic attendance.

#### How much does ADP pay for an insulin pump?

The ADP will pay 100 per cent of the price for your insulin pump. Payment is made directly to the vendor of your choice once funding is approved.

#### How much money will I receive to help pay for supplies?

You will receive an annual grant of \$2,400.

#### How will payments for supplies be made?

You will receive 4 cheques in equal amounts, on a quarterly basis.

#### How often must I apply?

You must continue to meet ADP eligibility criteria to receive the ongoing grant for



insulin pump supplies. A renewal form will be mailed to you every year. You must complete this form with your pediatric diabetes assessment team and return it to the ADP to continue receiving your insulin pump supplies grant. After this form is returned, the ADP will continue to automatically send you payments every 3 months.

#### Where should I buy my insulin pump and supplies?

You may buy your insulin pump from any vendor who is registered with the ADP.

You may buy your insulin pump related supplies from any vendor in Ontario who sells these products.

#### Is there a warranty?

Manufacturers of insulin pumps provide a minimum 4 year warranty.

#### What if I need a new insulin pump?

The replacement period for an insulin pump is 5 years. If your pump is beyond economical repair you may be eligible for ADP funding for a replacement pump. You must send the ADP a quote from your vendor describing the repairs required and the cost.

ADP does not pay for a replacement during the 5 years if the original pump is lost, damaged through misuse, or under the manufacturer's warranty.

#### What if I have more questions?

For further information write:  
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care  
Operational Support Branch  
Assistive Devices Program  
5700 Yonge Street, 7th Floor  
Toronto, Ontario M2M 4K5

OR visit web-site: [www.health.gov.on.ca](http://www.health.gov.on.ca)

OR call one of the telephone numbers listed below:

Toronto.....416-327-8804  
Toll Free.....1-800-268-6021  
TDD/TTY.....416-327-4282  
Toll Free.....1-800-387-5559  
Fax.....416-327-8192