

# Wellness: Where to Start?

For the past few years, the health care industry has been focused on the next platform for delivering services through the private sector. The industry experts seem to all agree that the “managed care” model, which came into active existence in the mid-80’s, had lost its steam in effectiveness.

By the early 21st Century, a new model began to take shape and today is generally referred to as “Consumerism.” In essence, this school of thought recognizes that the patient/consumer must become more active in determining which and how much medical services are needed and how much is to be paid for them.

The Federal Government has passed enabling tax legislation to encourage this alternative delivery system. The patient/consumer continues to receive services tax free, when they are paid by their employer’s benefit plan or by an insurance carrier. The new tax packages allow the individual to set aside money for future medical expenses on a pre-tax basis, and never be taxed on the funds as long as they are used for medical expenses.



With these key tax incentives in place, the next industry priority is to educate the employees and their family members about making health care choices, and maybe more important, becoming more aware of their personal health status. This latter issue is commonly referred to as “wellness” and is quickly becoming a major strategy for most employers as they evaluate their health benefits plans.

Broadly speaking, “wellness” is a healthy state of wellbeing free from disease. As it relates to employers, wellness is an effort to assist employees and their dependents to work toward a healthy state, in order to improve workplace productivity and reduce the cost of benefits.

Employers are considering their options and initiating various measures to incorporate wellness education and activities to influence the behavior of these individuals covered by their various health benefits plans. Here is an overview of what we see taking place in the market.

## BASIC STEPS

- Distribute generic, educational material prepared by insurance carriers and other health care providers or consulting firms.
- Post some or all educational material on the company intranet.
- Establish a periodic schedule for releasing information.
- Provide opportunity for employees (and their family members) to ask questions about the distributed materials.
- Promotion of carrier wellness programs included with medical plan at no charge.

## INCREASED COMMITMENT

- Use all or some of the Basic Steps.
- Create unique house internal mechanism to broadcast specifically written articles about health care issues.
- Publish through all available sources, including mail to residences of employees, intranet, postings and internal company distribution channels.
- Contract with disease management firm to offer health risk assessments and direct patient consulting.

## MAJOR STRATEGIES WITH SIGNIFICANT BUDGET SUPPORT

- Take advantage of most Basic and Increased Commitment Steps.
- Retain wellness consulting firm(s) to conduct classes for all employees and perhaps their family members.
- Provide incentives through the medical benefits plan for those covered members willing to submit to smoking cessation, weight loss, or other programs.
- Offer consumerism oriented medical plans as an option to traditional benefit offerings.
- Flu Shots provided at no charge on site. (cont. pg 2)

## ADVANCED COMMITMENT WITH LONG TERM STRATEGIES

- Take advantage of all appropriate measures that conform to the company’s operating environment.
- Offer only consumer oriented medical plan options.
- Organize health care “fairs” and other special events to provide health care consumer information and various health services, including risk assessments, medical examinations, and various health screening services.
- Consider including family members in these special events.
- Provide strong incentives or requirements (both positive and negative incentives) for behavioral changes.

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