

Employee Benefit Consultants

The Administrator

WINTER 2008

Important news and updates from your benefits professional

INSIDE

Industry Approaches

The Next Generation of CDHPs

Benefit Beat

Wellness Plans Not Just for the Unhealthy

Health Wise

Can Flying Really Make You Sick?

Focus On Your Health...

Questions and Answers, Helpful Facts, Trends and More!

Feature Story

Our Mission for 2008: Educate, Engage and Ease!



While consumer directed healthcare plans have not yet arrived at every company, the trend to consumerism has raised employee awareness, both to their health benefit plan and their well-being.

Best practices in benefits administration require that we help clients focus on the “three E’s” of healthcare benefits – educating employees on how their lifestyle can impact their health and the cost of their benefit plan; engaging employees in the healthcare and benefit plan processes; and easing plan use by doing everything we can to eliminate the fear and red tape common to insurance and healthcare delivery. Self-funded plan designs go a long way in helping us accomplish these objectives.

Talking Face-To-Face is Important

The stakes are so high today that simply sending out a packet or running an employee through their benefit options during orientation is not enough. The best way to make a positive impact on health plan costs

and personal health is to encourage periodic face-to-face meetings. We can help your company provide thorough, on-going education about your plan, the associated costs and any wellness initiatives being offered. It’s the only way to empower employees to make better healthcare decisions.

Focus On Preventive Care

Keeping the lines of communication open really can help people with chronic conditions receive the care they need. Disease management programs, wellness workshops or simple lunch and learn sessions can help shape a healthy culture and increase health awareness. Identifying small problems early on can help your plan avoid costly claims down the road.

Making Everything Easier

Since browsing the Internet is becoming far more common, we are constantly enhancing our website to make personal, secure health plan information easier to access and easier to use. We can also help with timely email newsletters and other bulletins. Being consistent will keep awareness of benefits high and encourage useful feedback.

Our ongoing success with wellness and disease management programs proves that focusing on the “three E’s” can help control costs and enhance the value of your health benefit plan. Increased value will help your company attract and retain the best employees, lower overall employee turnover and boost productivity, making your company more competitive in the marketplace.

Q&A

Bringing you answers to tough questions

What is the economic impact of chronic disease?

Rates of chronic disease have risen dramatically, despite improvements in therapies and treatment. More than half of Americans suffer from one or more chronic diseases, contributing significantly to rising medical expenditures.

A recent study sought to quantify the potential impact on employers, the government and the nation's economy. It estimates current and future treatment costs, as well as lost productivity for the most common chronic diseases - cancer (several types), diabetes, hypertension, stroke, heart disease, pulmonary conditions and mental disorders. Below are some of the findings:

- Over 109 million Americans report having at least one of these diseases, a total of 162 million cases.
- The annual impact of these diseases on the economy is \$1.3 trillion.
- Of that, lost productivity totals \$1.1 trillion while \$277 billion is spent on treatment, annually.
- Modest improvements in disease prevention and treatment could reduce the increase in the economic impact of disease by 27 percent annually and increase GDP with corresponding gains in productivity.

Industry Approaches

The Next Generation of CDHPs



When most of us think of consumer directed health plans, we think of the basics: a high deductible core plan with an HSA or HRA and web-based tools added on. As the marketplace continues to evolve, experts think a new generation of CDHPs will emerge.

The foundation of these plans will be more useful information – data that people can really use to make more informed healthcare decisions. After all, the real purpose behind consumer directed health plans is to engage and empower people.

So what kind of information are these so-called experts talking about? Where will it come from and how will people put it to use? As health plan administration specialists, we know that information can be used to influence benefit plan design, improve price transparency and enhance management of HRA and

HSA accounts. After all, we have been doing these things with self-funded health plans and FSA accounts for many, many years.

A few CDHP innovations may include the following:

- Managing chronic disease by no longer applying deductibles to prescribed care for chronic conditions, such as diabetes and hypertension. The same may apply to disease management related activities.
- Cost sharing may take on added meaning. In addition to directing people with in and out of network benefit schedules, a health plan may direct people to selected hospitals who outperform others in various specialties such as cardiac or maternity care.
- Plans will likely continue to incorporate more financial incentives for people who stay well and those who utilize health management and wellness programs in an effort to spend less on medical care.

We continue to enhance our web tools to help plan participants find the information they need. Some of the areas we continue to focus on include technology designed to make it easier for people to manage their HSA, HRA or FSA account and providing more in-depth information on healthcare providers. Because employees participating in CDHPs are more actively involved in their health, they are more likely to look at information on cost and quality of care. Working to improve this kind of information will make consumer directed health plans even more effective as instruments of change.



TRENDS *Latest Happenings In Today's World*

More Pets Are Heading To Work

While working like a dog may not be ideal, working with one certainly is. According to a recent study by the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association, nearly one in five companies allow pets at work. They reduce stress levels, boost staff morale and enhance productivity. When their pets are at work, employees are in less of a hurry to leave work and get home in time for their evening walks.

The study also showed that 55 million Americans believe pets at work lead to a more creative work environment. Fifty-three million believe it decreases absenteeism while 50 million Americans think pets help co-workers co-exist better. Not only that, millions more believe pets in the workplace not only help with employee-employer relations, but also decrease smoking at work and result in employees working longer hours.



Put Online Health Info to Work

Harris polls states that over half of all adults visit the web for health information, up from 29 percent in 2001. Doctors say it is common for patients to walk in their office with a stack of webpage printouts. With the push for the healthcare industry to speed the transition to electronic health record formats, many experts believe patients will ultimately be the stewards of their own health information.



BENEFIT BEAT

Keeping An Eye on What's Happening

Wellness Plans Not Just for the Unhealthy

Imagine offering a \$250 incentive to smokers who quit and remain smoke-free for six months, only to discover that non-smokers are picking up the habit just to qualify for the reward? Believe it or not, this really happened at an auto parts manufacturer based in the Midwest, which caused the company to completely stop the program.

With more than 40 percent of employers who offer healthcare coverage offering some type of incentive for healthy behavior, HIPAA is beginning to require that employers make allowances in health and wellness programs for workers who already maintain healthy behavior. Because privacy rules also prohibit employers from accessing worker's personal health records, more employers are outsourcing the management of their wellness program to independent third party administrators.

Health screenings are becoming an important first step toward wellness because they help identify the needs of participating employees. More and more, the emphasis seems to be on customized, practical ways to get healthier. While increased productivity and fighting rising healthcare costs are common goals, companies are starting to see a positive change in culture. Employers are feeling a buzz in the workplace as more employees are talking about wellness. If wellness is like most trends, talk will lead to action. More importantly, wellness investments are beginning to yield measurable returns.

If implementing wellness strategies is on your list of New Year's resolutions, talk to us. Claims information and an understanding of your business will help us work with you to design a simple, practical program that can make a difference.



Health Wise

Can Flying Really Make You Sick?

At a time when airplanes are often packed with travelers from around the globe and headlines warn of bird flu and cruise-ship outbreaks, passengers are more nervous than ever about who is sharing their seat space.

But according to travel experts, airplanes typically pose no bigger health or germ exposure risk than any other public place. The best way to stay healthy while flying is to drink plenty of bottled water and wash hands often. Below are answers to some common questions about the health risks of air travel and what is being done by airlines to battle the germs onboard:

Q: Can an illness be caught from the passenger next to you or germs left behind on a previous flight?

Sitting in a seat that an ill person has been in isn't likely to get you sick. There is some risk when spray particles land on you, if you wipe that area of your skin on your nose or eyes. But respiratory droplets cannot penetrate your skin.

Q: How often do airlines clean their planes?

Typically, only surface cleaning is done at the gate. Although each airline is different, the industry standard for deep-cleaning, a more intense process that can include seat scrubbing, cleaning air vents and changing upholstery, is every 30 days. Pillows and blankets can go just as long without being washed.

Q: Is the air on the plane safe?

At least half the air on most commercial planes comes from outside the aircraft and passes through a filter that removes contaminants. The air on a plane is actually better than most home and office environments because it changes more frequently.

Many see the responsibility to become a knowledge navigator as a good thing, one that makes healthcare much more of a collaborative process. So who will become the keeper of our health information - Google, Microsoft, WebMD or perhaps a health search engine we haven't yet heard of? Consumerism continues to grow, and this will be an interesting development to watch. The challenge is motivating people to use the information to their benefit.

Schools Sell Fewer Sugary Drinks

A sharp decline of sugary drink sales in our nation's schools could be a sign that multiple efforts to offer students healthier food and beverages are paying off.

According to a report from the American Beverage Association, overall shipments to schools fell 26 percent between 2004 and 2007. Shipments of sugared sodas fell 45 percent, while plain and flavored bottled

waters rose 23 percent, contributing to a 41 percent decrease in the number of calories contained in school beverages.

By the 2009-10 school year, sales in high schools will be limited to diet sodas, waters, sports drinks, unsweetened juices and milk products, under an agreement with an anti-childhood-obesity alliance of the William C. Clinton Foundation and the American Heart Association.





DID YOU KNOW? *New Ideas for Healthy Consumers*

Boost Your Heart Health

Although heart disease is America's number one killer, there is some good news – having a healthier heart is within everyone's reach. All the old rules still apply: eat less fat, eat more fruits and vegetables and keep blood pressure and blood cholesterol levels in check. But there are more ways to increase the health of your heart.

Eat breakfast. Heart attacks commonly occur between 7am and noon, when the cells that help blood to clot, called platelets, are stickiest. Eating breakfast seems to make platelets less sticky and less likely to clump together and block a vital artery.

Meet the "As". Antioxidants, such as vitamins A, C, E and beta-carotene, appear to slow plaque formation in the arteries.

Kick the tobacco habit. The lungs are not the only part of your body that smoking affects. Within just a few years of quitting this habit, you can cut the risk of heart attack by at least half.

Get off that couch. One of the greatest risk factors in heart attack deaths is actually sedentary living – not high cholesterol. Thirty minutes of moderate physical activity a day can result in fitness benefits comparable to traditional exercise routines.

Scales Measuring More Than Weight

Choosing a bathroom scale isn't as easy as it used to be. Today's high-tech digital scales are not just about weight, but also health and fitness, displaying items such as body fat percentage, hydration level, muscle mass, bone mass, the amount of fat on your belly, how many calories you can eat daily without gaining and some even rate your physique from "very muscular" to "obese."



Using a technique called bioelectrical impedance analysis, or BIA, the scale sends a low-level electric current through your legs, measuring the resistance provided by the body. By inputting your age, gender, height, and in some cases, your activity level, the scale uses a scientific formula to calculate the percentage of fat and muscle.

When trying to monitor weight loss progress, experts recommend stepping on the scale regularly – either once a day or once a week. And even if your scale is not exact, you can still monitor progress effectively.

Anger Management Improves Health

Besides alienating others, losing your temper can also result in numerous health problems, such as headaches, upset stomach and heart attacks. Take control of your anger – for your own well-being!

- **Count to 10** - When something upsets you, take three or four deep breaths and ask yourself "Will this really matter a week or month from now?"
- **Walk it off** - Find a quiet place to calm down and take a second look at how you're reacting to the situation.
- **Distract yourself** - Play soothing music or dive into a task that turns negative energy into positive.
- **Keep a log** - Monitoring your hostile thoughts will help discover and control how frequently your temperature rises.
- **Ask for help** - Don't be afraid to try counseling or other lifestyle changes. Your health and relationships may depend on it.

Please Contact Us: This newsletter is not intended as a substitute for personal medical or employee benefits advice. Please consult your physician before making decisions which may impact your personal health. Talk to your benefits administrator before implementing strategies which may impact your organization's employee benefit objectives.

E B C

EMPLOYEE BENEFIT CONSULTANTS

www.ebctpa.com

Albuquerque
Albuquerque, New Mexico
Phone: 505-292-5533

Appleton
Appleton, Wisconsin
Phone: 920-731-5333

Cleveland
Cleveland, Ohio
Phone: 440-526-2730

Des Moines
West Des Moines, Iowa
Phone: 515-221-2340

Findlay
Findlay, Ohio
Phone: 419-423-3823

Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky
Phone: 502-423-0505

Milwaukee
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Phone: 414-365-4600