



health- headlines

CORPORATE HEALTH REPORT / JULY 2009

Industry insider information to help YOU do your job better, faster and smarter

Industry insider: Talking to Congress

In June, the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM) briefed Congressional leaders on Capitol Hill about changes it is seeking in federal policy in order to ensure America's workforce remains strong and that **workplace health becomes a fundamental element in the nation's health care reform efforts.**

The initiative is called *Healthy Workforce Now*. According to ACOEM President, Pamela Hymel, MPH, "The time has come for the United States to recognize the workplace as a critical location for achieving the goals of health reform and for improving the overall health of employees and their families."

"It will be impossible to achieve true health care reform without this shift in focus," she said. "Our workforce—the engine that drives our economy and supports the financial underpinnings of our health care system—is ailing and aging, with a rapid rise in chronic disease across all age groups. At the same time, many baby boomers are exiting the workplace altogether. As a consequence, the pipeline of healthy, productive workers in the United States is threatened. Without a healthy, able, and available workforce, the United States will not be able to sustain its long-term health care programs—nor will it thrive in an increasingly competitive global marketplace."

To learn more about ACOEM's advocacy on workforce health, go to www.acoem.org/healthyworkforcenow.aspx.

Bottom-line business

Good news: Employees are using wellness benefits

As American business continues to search for ways to contain costs such as health care costs in a troubled economy, the majority of working Americans with access to employer-sponsored wellness benefits are using them. The Principal Financial Well-Being Index is showing that 79%

of employees take advantage of educational tools and resources offered by their employers, while 77% participate in both blood sugar and cholesterol screenings.

“Improving Americans’ health and reducing health care benefits must be a team effort between workers and employers,” said the Principal’s Jerry Ripperger. “It’s a win-win for both involved—workers benefit from healthier lifestyles and lower costs, while employers see a 2-to-1 return on investment through higher productivity and lower absenteeism, among other factors.”

Despite the interest shown on the annual index, many employers have been slow to make wellness benefits fully available to employees. [But those aren’t the people reading this newsletter!]

Try meeting on the move

Get employees out of the office and on their feet. Use meetings on the move, suggest public health experts from Washington University. Walking and talking promotes physical activity, gives people a different perspective, improves team spirit, is cheap and green, and may lower stress levels, among other benefits. Try these tips:

- Set an agenda (brainstorming, planning, informational).
- Plan a simple route (local parks, tracks, empty office areas, warehouse).
- Assign a note taker or use a tape recorder.
- Encourage walkers to wear comfortable shoes.
- Vary the locations of your walks to increase creativity.

Sick or just sick of work?

Some employees frequently call in sick or make excuses to miss work—you know them. “We all get sick and tired,” said Linda Naimi, a Purdue University management professor. Employees who skip work when they don’t have a valid reason hurt not just themselves but those around them, she said. The fix: Managers should meet with employees who are chronically absent and seek to understand what is causing the behavior. Employee assistance programs and counseling services might be helpful, as can making adjustments in work schedules and duties, if warranted. Disciplinary actions may be used as a last resort, she said.

FREE-quent flyers

FREE white paper: An expert panel convened by Mercer discusses why the US health care system consumes a much larger share of national income than it does in other countries. *Tracking the Contribution of U.S. Health Care to the Global Competitiveness of American Employers and Workers: 2009 Business Roundtable Health Care Value Comparability Study.* Download the 27-page report at www.businessroundtable.org/sites/default/files/BRT%20Full%20Report%20Final.pdf.

FREE paper on paperwork: “Take the paper out of paperwork.” The Center for Health Transformation provides a roadmap for how electronic administration can save the US health

system billions (costs of paper, printing, postage and labor for manual processing in health care is estimated to be nearly \$30 billion/year in waste). Download at www.emdeon.com/pdfs/TakingPaperOutofPaperwork.pdf. (Dare you to print the 15 pages!)

FREE report on health savings accounts and high-deductible health plans: A report summarizes a recent survey showing widespread misconceptions about the features and benefits of HSAs and HDHPs. Consumers reveal what employers can do to make them more likely to enroll in these plans. Bottom line: Employees don't understand them. Click the survey at www.GuardianBenefits.com.

FREE Action Strategies Toolkit to create healthy communities and prevent childhood obesity. From the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Leadership for Healthy Communities toolkit helps community (and corporate) leaders take action on land use, trails, and bike lanes, and create incentives for supermarkets and farmers' markets. Access at www.rwjf.org/childhoodobesity/product.jsp?id=42514&c=EMC-ADV.

FREE medical science blog. From Mayo Clinic, the new *Advancing the Science* blog looks at how research improves patient care. Follow the discussion at <http://advancingthescience.mayo.edu>.

From our bookshelf: From time to time, we will recommend books not to miss. Here are two of them to add to your professional reading list or your company's wellness library:

- ***Emotional Intelligence 2.0*** by Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves. Includes 66 strategies you can use to increase your EQ (yes, it can increase, unlike IQ), an online EQ test, and revealing stories. *Why read this book?* Because 70% of us do not handle conflict or stress effectively, and just 36% understand emotions as they happen. The greatest challenges are at work, where just 15% feel respected and valued by employers. (www.TalentSmart.com)
- In a competitive, global economy, you need to stand out. Whether you're hoping for a promotion, trying to land a major client, or striving to make a difference in your community, one thing is for sure: The world has no room for shrinking violets. The award-winning ***Self Marketing Power*** by Jeff Beals is a book about business, career, and life success. It's perfect for anyone who wants to boost revenue, start a business, close more deals, or move up the corporate ladder. (www.SelfMarketingPower.com)

Odds @ the end: You spend about 8.5 hours a day in front of a screen. Think about it. Your computer, cell phone, TV, even GPS, according to a Ball State University study.

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