

Prevention Key Tenet of Health Care Reform

The increasing prevalence of chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and depression signals an urgent need for workforce health risk assessments and targeted interventions by U.S. employers and their health care provider partners, experts say.

Without targeted interventions, the outlook is not favorable, according to the Center for Studying Health System Change (HSC).

To reduce the human and economic burden of disease, the Milken Institute, an independent economic research organization, recommends the adoption of incentives to promote prevention and early intervention and a renewed national commitment to achieve a “healthy body weight.” The Milken Institute’s recommendations are in alignment with trends in corporate America and health care reform themes emanating from the White House.

The Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease (PFCDD) - a coalition of patients, providers, business/labor groups, and health policy experts - has endorsed a shift from reactive medical care to proactive incentives for patients and providers to more effectively prevent, detect and manage chronic disease. In a recent paper, *Congressional Budget Office Guiding Concepts*, the PFCDD suggests “scoring” disease prevention and wellness initiatives to evaluate their effectiveness in three areas: the time-frame of analysis, the transparency of assumptions and the broader economic impact.

“Recognition of the opportunity to achieve the long-term benefits of investment in disease prevention

The Burden of Chronic Disease

- The Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services estimate \$1.65 trillion are spent each year to treat patients with one or more chronic conditions.
- The Milken Institute, an independent think tank, estimates chronic conditions result in an annual \$1.3 trillion in productivity loss.
- Hewitt Associates, a global human resources firm, estimates that an employer with 9,500 employees and 500 pre-65 retirees spends \$18 to \$22 million a year on direct medical care for its diabetic population alone.
- Research conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation shows that half of American adults with chronic conditions do not receive appropriate care.
- In a study based on 2007 data, the Center for Studying Health System Change found that 55 percent of obese adults had at least one chronic condition, compared to 30 percent for normal-weight and 36 percent for overweight working-age populations.

and management initiatives would provide a positive framework for making critical health policy decisions,” said PFCDD Executive Director Ken Thorpe, Ph.D. “As Congress and the administration continue to work on health reform, it is important that our lawmakers have the best information available regarding the costs and benefits of health reform proposals.”

Occupational Medicine’s Role

Occupational health professionals are poised to assume leadership positions as reforms gain traction, in part because there is a shortage of physicians trained in preventive medicine - the foundation of occupational medical practice. (Occupational medicine physicians achieve board-certification through the American Board of Preventive Medicine.)

“Reforms will affect all medical specialties and practices,” including occupational medicine, Clarion Johnson, M.D., global medical director for Exxon Mobil Corporation, said during a panel discussion on health care reform at the American College of Occupational

Is the Flu Compensable Under Workers Comp?

With the advent of the novel influenza A (H1N1) “swine flu” virus, employers are particularly aware of the need for preventive measures and their potential liability for exposures that may occur at work. According to Jon Coppelman, owner of Lynch, Ryan & Associates, sponsor of the *Workers’ Comp Insider* website, a worker with the flu may be eligible for workers’ compensation benefits if certain requirements are met:

- the individual must be “in the course and scope of employment” when exposed to the virus;
- the exposure must arise out of work (as opposed to being a random event); and
- work itself must put the person in harm’s way.

For example, Mr. Coppelman said if an employee with the flu comes to work and exposes co-workers in an enclosed area to the virus, then those workers might make a case that the illness is work-related.

Workplace Exercise Program Gets Results

“Move to Improve,” a workplace program that encourages employees to set exercise goals, substantially increased workers’ physical activity in a study conducted by University of Georgia exercise and health researchers. In the study, 1,442 participants set weekly physical activity goals and received incentives for meeting them over a three-month period. After six weeks, 51 percent of the participants did at least five, 30-minute moderate exercise sessions or two 20-minute vigorous exercise sessions a week, an increase of 31 percent from the start date. Of those in a control group, 25 percent logged similar exercise sessions.

During the study period, weekly exercise times were increased in 10-minute increments. Workers used handbooks to help them set their personal exercise goals and overcome obstacles to staying active. Virtually all participants increased their levels of activity; only a few dropped out.

“The biggest surprise was the steady and sustained progress. That can probably be explained by the social incentives and support from personal goals and achievements that had a direct impact on team success,” said Rod Dishman, lead researcher and exercise science professor at UGA.

Source: *American Journal of Prevention Medicine*, February 2009



Americans Value Access to Care

When spending their own money, Americans value access to care more than any other health-related product or service, according to recent survey findings. A representative sample of respondents overwhelmingly ranked access to physicians, hospital services and emergency care as their three most-valued health-related priorities. Psychiatric care, vocational rehabilitation, mental retardation services and substance abuse programs were ranked as the least valued. However, these services were utilized by a relatively small percentage of respondents in comparison to the most highly valued services.

Source: *Spectrum Health Value Study™*;
www.healthvaluestudy.com

Resource Directory

ADA & the ADA Amendments Act: Dealing with Disabilities in the Workplace; special report discusses nuances of the amendments act; www.hrhero.com.

An Employer's Guide to Employee Assistance Programs; based on a study of best practices and evidence-based approaches; National Business Group on Health; www.businessgrouphealth.org.

Zero Trends: Health as a Serious Economic Strategy; comprehensive guide to employer-sponsored health management programs; www.hmrc.umich.edu.

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and Environmental Medicine's annual conference in April. "Occupational medicine physicians will encounter challenges that reflect on the many settings in which we practice."

In addition to prevention and wellness, Dr. Johnson expects expanded coverage for the uninsured, federally supported insurance plans, expanded use of communications technology and improved incentives or payment for better care to top the reform agenda.

He noted that Exxon Mobil is a self-insured company, and with regard to the health and well-being of its employees, there is no room for compromise. Consequently, the company is working with multiple vendors on information technology solutions, improved care management through the use of evidence-based medicine and the development of safer work environments for its employees.

President's Message

At a recent meeting, business leaders told President Obama about innovative prevention and wellness measures they have implemented as part of ongoing efforts to reduce health care costs. The president has directed various government agencies to study these programs with the goal of designing similar plans for federal employees.

"When you hear what Safeway or Johnson & Johnson or any of these other companies have done, what you've seen is sustained experimentation over many years and a shift in incentive structures so that employees see concrete benefits" to taking control of their own health, he said.

The president noted that when companies take steps to improve employee health and prevent disease, it is not just the workers who benefit: "Companies see their bottom lines improve. If we can do that in individual companies, there's no reason why we can't do that for the country as a whole."

Prevention Plan

Responding to the president's message, Christopher Fey, chairman and CEO of U.S. Preventive Medicine, suggests his company's approach, known as the Prevention Plan™, could save billions of dollars by helping Americans avoid expensive medical care and improve worker productivity.



Medical technology and the health status of patients are leading contributors to rising health care costs, according to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Under the Prevention Plan, participants complete a health risk assessment and receive a risk stratification report, a personal health record, a dedicated coach/care advocate (as necessary), clinically recommended screenings, early detection tests and other personalized care tools.

"The answer is really quite simple: follow the rules of the clinical discipline of preventive medicine using a personalized approach," said Fey, who notes that U.S. companies have medical, dental and vision plans, but none have a comprehensive suite of preventive services.

"Only by providing every American with an integrated program of prevention, early disease detection and chronic condition management will the health crisis be brought under control and maintained at an affordable level," he says in a letter to Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius.

"It's time to step up and do what the experts tell us – to deploy integrated clinical preventive medicine guidelines for primary, secondary and tertiary prevention. By doing so and using sophisticated data analytics, we can prove outcomes are better and provide the savings the president is looking for," Fey said.

Injury Research Agenda

The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, a division of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has released a new Injury Research Agenda that describes research needs for 2009-2018. Priority topics listed in the 120-page agenda include injury response (acute injury care, traumatic brain injury), unintentional injury prevention and violence prevention. Visit www.cdc.gov/injury/researchagenda.

Job Bias Complaints Up

Workplace discrimination charge filings with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission rose to an unprecedented level of 95,402 during Fiscal Year (FY) 2008, an increase of 15 percent compared to FY 2007. Charges based on age and retaliation experienced the largest annual increases, while allegations based on race, sex and retaliation continued as the most frequently filed charges. For enforcement and litigation statistics, visit www.eeoc.gov.

Job Funding

Under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, the U.S. Department of Labor is funding programs to help Americans get jobs through a national network of One-Stop Career Centers. Target populations include low-income, low-skilled Americans and youths seeking summer employment. Visit www.servicelocator.org and <http://careeronestop.org>.



Paid Time Off

The U.S. House of Representatives has introduced legislation that would require all employers with at least 15 employees to provide up to seven paid sick days a year. The bill, the Healthy Families Act, H.R. 2460, was introduced by Rep. Rosa DeLauro D-Conn. The proposed legislation would affect most employers' paid-time-off policies.

Ask the Attorney: Medical Leave

Q: *What steps should our company take to legally protect our interests if we need to terminate an employee who requests medical leave?*

A: If you are considering terminating an employee who has requested medical leave or who is out on medical leave, make sure your reasons are justified. Consult with a professional to make sure you follow the correct procedures and that the evidence will support the conclusion that the employee would have been terminated regardless of whether medical leave was requested. **Some other tips:**

- Perform honest performance evaluations.
- Address performance problems when they occur; don't wait until an employee requests leave to get serious about taking corrective action.
- Establish policies for immediate termination for serious policy violations, acts of dishonesty, fraud and document falsification.
- Apply company rules consistently so all employees are subject to the same disciplinary procedures for similar performance problems.

Source: Robin Foret, the Foret Law Firm, Texas; www.HRRResource.com

OSHA Actions

Combustible Dust: The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is initiating comprehensive rulemaking on combustible dust. The agency plans to evaluate possible regulatory methods and request data and comments on issues including hazard recognition, assessment and communication.

Diacetyl Review: The agency convened a Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act panel to review and comment on a draft proposed rule on occupational exposure to diacetyl and food flavorings containing diacetyl.

Enforcement: The Government Accountability Office advised Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis to take steps to "ensure the quality and consistency" of OSHA's whistleblower program, which is designed to protect workers who report prohibited workplace practices to authorities.