

## Employers Can Influence Health Behaviors

By Karen O'Hara

Employers have the power to promote healthy lifestyle choices and even change human behavior, industry observers say.

"Employers are putting a much higher priority on wellness and lifestyle improvement programs that promote employee health, well-being and productivity than ever before," observes Helen Darling, president of the National Business Group on Health.

"Employers have the most important hook - our jobs and our incomes," adds Ford Titus, president and CEO of Pro-Health Care, Inc., Waukesha, Wis. "It is in the workplace that people can be incentivized or disincentivized to take responsibility for their own health status. It is in the workplace that insurance plans can be re-designed to encourage value-based purchasing. I believe leverage of the health plan lies with the employers who are paying the bill."

The caveat, he notes, is that "employers have to be resolute in their desire to get involved in maintenance of the health status of their employees."

Titus contends that employers have a right to manage employee health risks the same way they manage other types of risk, because "any employer who provides health insurance assumes the health status of their employees." However, he acknowledges there is a learning curve involved. Historically, employers have not taken a comprehensive approach to managing the health and well-being of employees and dependents.

Titus, whose career with the health system spans nearly 40 years, spoke on *Consumerism: Getting Employ-*



Ford Titus

### Consumers Gaining Control Over Their Health Care Choices

The Deloitte Center for Health Solutions' new report on *Consumer-Directed Health Plans: Current Trends, Emerging Opportunities* summarizes trade, peer-reviewed and case studies, and it offers a strategic perspective for executives considering the impact of CDHPs on their organizations.

The research suggests most Americans will be playing a larger role in purchasing health services, either directly through individual health insurance policies and high-deductible plans, or indirectly by using tools to make comparisons among doctors, hospitals, treatment options and insurance products. Deloitte advises employers to take steps now to be prepared for this major shift.

In a related project, Deloitte conducted a survey of 3,000 Americans and published the findings as the *2008 Survey of Health Care Consumers*.

"More than anything, the findings convince us that Americans no longer see themselves only as patients, but as consumers who want to take greater control of their health care," said Paul Keckley, executive director of the center.

"Consumers will redefine our health care market, but how they do it is the most important strategic question the health care industry must answer."

Source: [www.deloitte.com/us/consumerism](http://www.deloitte.com/us/consumerism)

ers on Board during a recent keynote presentation at a conference for occupational health professionals. Pro-Health Care operates hospitals, medical clinics, senior care facilities, a hospice and a fitness center. It also has a well-established occupational health presence in Waukesha and surrounding communities.

Barry Hall, a principal with Buck Consultants, a global human resources consulting firm, agrees

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## Follow-up Needed In Response to Health Risk Questionnaires

In a recent employee survey, Hewitt Associates found that health risk questionnaires (HRQs) and other tools may influence healthy behaviors by helping employees more easily understand and address their health care needs. Among survey respondents:

- 75 percent found the results helpful;
- More than 40 percent learned something they did not previously know about their health; and
- More than half took actions to reduce or manage potential health risks.

However, Hewitt found that an HRQ is only as valuable as its follow-up activities. Only 32 percent of HRQ participants reported they were required to complete a follow-up. To maintain the momentum of awareness that a questionnaire provides, companies need to deploy year-round programs to encourage employees to take action to address their risks, said Jennifer Murphy, Hewitt health care communication leader.

**Source:** [www.HewittAssociates.com](http://www.HewittAssociates.com)

## Getting Blood Pressure Under Control

An employer-based hypertension health management program appears to help employees achieve goals for reducing their blood pressure. *A Health Outcome Assessment of the Introductory Blood Pressure Success Zone*

## Resource Directory

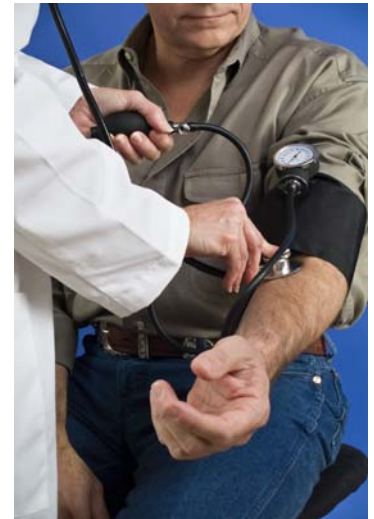
*Construction Chart Book : The U.S. Construction Industry and its Workers*, 4th Edition, 2008; published by the Center for Construction Research and Training; [www.cpwr.com/rp-chartbook.html](http://www.cpwr.com/rp-chartbook.html).

*Depression in the Workplace*; the April 2008 edition of the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* is devoted to depression impacts and solutions: [www.acoem.org](http://www.acoem.org).

*Expanding Our Understanding of the Psychosocial Work Environment*; DHHS (NIOSH) Publication Number 2008-104; [www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2008-104](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2008-104).

*Low Back Pain: An Evidence-based, bio-psychosocial model for clinical management*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.; Jane Derebery and John Anderson; OEM Press; to order, contact OEM Health Information: 800-533-8046; [www.oempres.com](http://www.oempres.com).

at Chrysler, LLC, featured pre- and -post assessments to evaluate the benefits of a hypertension intervention program providing education, support and awareness training to employees over a six-month period at 32 worksites. Among study participants, the blood pressure control rate (<140/90 mmHg without diabetes and <130/80 mmHg with diabetes) improved from 52 percent to 62 percent ( $P<0.0005$ ). Mean awareness/knowledge scores improved from 77 to 80 ( $P<0.01$ ) and 83 percent “agreed” or “strongly agreed” the program helped them better understand and control their blood pressure. Findings from the study were presented by researchers at the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine’s annual conference.



## Post-Accident Testing Impacts Claims

A study on post-accident drug testing (PADT) in a Fortune 500 company suggests that PADT programs can reduce the number of workers’ compensation claims filed, even in workplaces that already utilize other forms of employee drug testing. Researchers found that PADT is a promising method for improving occupational safety because it discourages drug use. However, it also “raises special policy concerns insofar as it may encourage some employees to hide their injuries.” **Source:** *Does Post-Accident Drug Testing Reduce Injuries? Evidence from a Large Retail Chain*, Social Science Research Network: <http://papers.ssrn.com>.

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that “employers have a tremendous opportunity before them to help employees and their families live healthier, happier lives.” In a white paper on *Health Care Consumerism: An Employer’s Perspective*, Hall asserts that effective health care consumerism requires active engagement on the part of all stakeholders, but he believes the impetus must come from employers who are committed to re-shaping employee attitudes.

“To engage and empower health care consumers, employers must implement innovative technology and communication strategies that interface seamlessly with vendor resources,” he said.

## The Role of Occupational Health

Many believe that hospital-based occupational health programs and dedicated freestanding medical practices are an appropriate home for health risk management services such as health risk assessments (HRA), biometric screening and targeted interventions.

“One of the most critical changes occurring in health care delivery is the transfer of power and influence away from government and physicians and toward employers,” said Frank Leone, executive director of the National Association of Occupational Health Professionals. “For providers, the ability to quantify and report favorable and cost-effective outcomes to their employer-clients is rapidly becoming the benchmark for quality.”

For his part, Titus believes consumerism begins and ends in the workplace, and he sees occupational health programs as the lynch pin. “The opportunities for occupational health professionals to identify at-risk populations and design programs to address and manage that risk, along with the resulting positive economic impacts, are just overwhelming,” he said.

To accomplish its own goals in this regard, Pro-Health selected the Aegis Health Group as a business partner to help it roll out a comprehensive employee health risk management program. The project was launched with the collection of HRA data from the 6,000 employees enrolled in the health system’s benefits plan. After identifying its top five risks - weight, cardiovascular disease, metabolic syndrome, diabetes and smoking - the health system introduced interventions and incentives to address these issues internally. Then it took the same approach into the marketplace.

“The external environment is changing. There are going to be great opportunities for occupational health providers who seize the moment,” said Henry Ross, CEO of Aegis Health Group. While many wellness and disease management programs are being offered

## Do Better-Informed Patients Have Better Outcomes?

Encouraging employees to take a more active role in how they access health care services is one of the fundamental concepts underlying consumer-directed health care (CDHC).

While not all agree with the CDHC approach, advocates say better-informed patients tend to have superior outcomes while simultaneously helping their employers contain costs. Employer surveys suggest

consumer-directed health plans are more effective when they are combined with strategies such as open communication among stakeholders, high-quality care, health and productivity programs, and performance measurement tools.



## What Can Employers Do?

The National Business Group on Health advises employers to consider:

- Offering “calculators” to employees to help them assess their annual medical costs.
- Holding sessions to educate employees on ways to receive the best care.
- Providing flexible spending accounts so employees are exposed to the cost of care and learn to plan for future health expenses.
- Introducing benefits such as health coaching and health care navigators.

through health plans, he believes occupational health providers with the requisite skills can deliver them more effectively because they are community-based and have established relationships with local companies.

Bill Lewis, M.D., senior vice president of medical operations, for Concentra in Phoenix, Ariz., makes a similar observation: “Employers are coming to occupational medicine providers for assistance because we are in the unique position of having direct relationships with them. They are taking charge of their workplace and putting in place benefits and incentives to have employees participate.”

## Employment Bias Claims Increase

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) said discrimination charge filings increased by 9 percent in 2007. Race, retaliation and gender were the most frequently alleged bias claims. Pregnancy bias charges jumped 14 percent, and sexual harassment filings increased for the first time in seven years, up by 4 percent compared to 2006 figures.

## Fire Code Changes Proposed

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) is proposing changes to 15 codes and



standards for the 2008 revision cycle. NFPA revises safety guidelines in response to user feedback, advances in technology, research, fires and lessons learned from incidents. Code categories under review include liquefied natural gas production, handling and storage, and electrical safety in the workplace.

Source: [www.nfpa.org](http://www.nfpa.org).

## Genetic Information Protections Enacted

President Bush signed the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008, H.R. 493, into law in an Oval Office ceremony. He said the bill “prohibits health insurers and employers from discriminating on the basis of genetic information...without undermining the basic premise of the insurance industry.” Democratic Sen. Ted Kennedy, a key proponent of the legislation, and his Republican counterpart, Mike Enzi, have described the bill as the first major civil rights legislation of the 21st Century and a path to more effective health screening for all Americans.

## High Court Rules on Retaliation

The U.S. Supreme Court issued two rulings that give employees more leeway when suing employers for retaliation based on race and age. To review the rulings, visit [www.supremecourt.us/opinions/07slipopinion.html](http://www.supremecourt.us/opinions/07slipopinion.html).

## Independent Contractor Law Introduced

The Employee Misclassification Prevention Act of 2008, H.R. 6111, has been introduced in Congress. It is intended to discourage employers from classifying workers improperly as independent contractors in order to pay them less. Proposed provisions include penalties for misclassifying employees and stringent recordkeeping requirements. Full-time employees who are misclassified as independent contractors lose workers' compensation coverage, minimum wage and overtime protections, and family and medical leave privileges.

## Recordkeeping Advisor Launched

The U.S. Department of Labor has introduced a *FirstStep Recordkeeping, Reporting and Notices e-Laws Advisor* to help employers determine which laws apply to them. The publication is part of a collection of *FirstStep* guidance on labor laws. Visit [www.dol.gov/elaws/firststep](http://www.dol.gov/elaws/firststep).

## OSHA Actions

**Dust Hazards:** The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has undertaken several initiatives to improve enforcement and outreach, including a new fact sheet on combustible dust: [www.osha.gov/oshdoc/data](http://www.osha.gov/oshdoc/data).

**HC Standards:** OSHA recently issued a compliance directive to enforce hexavalent chromium standards that went into effect May 30, 2006. The directive establishes uniform inspection and compliance procedures for compliance safety and health officers.

**Pandemic Preparedness:** OSHA is inviting comments on its “Proposed Guidance on Workplace Stockpiling of Respirators and Facemasks for Pandemic Influenza.” To view the document visit: <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2008/E8-10312.htm>. Comments must be submitted by July 8.

**Site Inspections:** The agency's Site-Specific Targeting plan will focus on approximately 3,800 high-hazard worksites on its primary list for unannounced comprehensive safety inspections in the next fiscal year. For the past decade, the agency has used an inspection program based on injury and illness data. This year's program was developed using the agency's Data Initiative for 2007, which surveyed approximately 80,000 employers to obtain their injury and illness numbers for 2006.