

# Wellness in the Workplace

## LivWell Solutions for Where You Work

by Valerie Aloisio

Imagine transforming your workplace environment into one that promotes health. With phrases like *stress-related illness, burnout, and sick building syndrome* becoming household words, and the typical work week now at 47 hours, it is becoming increasingly more difficult for companies to keep their workforce *healthy, happy and productive*.

*"Today, adults spend 60% of their waking hours at work! This makes the workplace an ideal opportunity for companies to take the initiative to promote health and wellness among its' employees. Successful companies depend on efficiency, productivity and cost effectiveness. A healthy workforce is essential to the continued growth and prosperity of any business,"* according to Valerie Aloisio – president of LivWell Solutions – a Fairfield, CT company that transforms workplace environments into environments that promote health and also provides wellness programs and lifestyle seminars based on the needs of a company.

The effectiveness of any program for employees will always be dependent on the active participation of the employees. And that's the major challenge for most companies. What if there was a way you could transform the workplace environment itself into one that promotes health so that employees – even without their active participation – would gain positive health benefits just by being at work?

### Health care costs and health insurance premiums continue to rise

Towers Perrin's 2006 health care survey of over 200 of the largest employers in the U.S. shows that health care costs are expected to rise eight percent in 2006, representing a 140 percent increase since 1996. The employer share of health care costs will be up 78 percent from 2001, the employee share up 68 percent.

A survey\* in early 2005 showed that an employer pays more for average family health insurance premiums than the typical minimum wage earner makes in a year. Between 2004 and 2005, premiums rose 9.2 percent, slowing from the previous two years' increase but still outpacing inflation and wage increases by six percent. While cost sharing did not increase significantly, the percentage of employers offering health coverage dropped from 69 percent in 2000 to 60 percent in 2005. Employers are attempting to cope with continual increases by adopting disease management, case management and wellness programs, and some have redesigned plans to promote consumer-driven behavior.

\*Health Affairs v24 no5 pp 1,273-1,280 Sep-Oct 2005

A large part of these health care costs can be directly linked to employee health habits and the workplace

environment. It is possible for employers to contain and even reduce health care and insurance premium costs through the establishment of regular wellness programs, lifestyle seminars, and changes in the workplace environment into one providing a positive effect on the health of the employee.



### Prevention vs. treatment

The most expensive way to handle health care is to do nothing or very little until a problem appears and then rely solely on treatment. Unfortunately, with most medical-related problems, that is precisely what most people do. The least expensive way to handle health care is to maintain and insure good health by simply switching the focus to prevention. To use a simple analogy, it's like changing the oil in your car. We all know that changing the oil on a regular basis (prevention) is a lot cheaper than having to change the engine (treatment). Latest statistics show that 80% of diseases and illnesses in North America are preventable, accounting for eight of the nine leading causes of death (around 980,000 per year). The causes behind many of these deaths are preventable factors – such as sedentary habits, poor nutrition, and poor lifestyle choices.

### Stress in the workplace

Today, 78% of Americans describe their jobs as stressful. What is the price a company pays for stress in the workplace? Consider this:

- Unnecessary absenteeism - (an estimated 1 million workers are absent every day due to stress).
- Increased accidents - (60-80% of accidents on the job are stress-related).
- Higher management costs - (40% of job turnover is due to stress).
- Reduced productivity.
- Increased medical costs.

As these findings clearly indicate, stress can have a devastating impact and exact a very real toll on any business when left unchecked.

## Why should your company consider a wellness program?

By offering a wellness program or transforming the workplace environment into one that promotes health, employers can take important steps to dramatically reduce health care costs and prevent unnecessary illness – making employees healthier and more productive. Some of the immediate benefits would include:

- Increased morale and loyalty
- Higher productivity
- Improved creativity
- Reduced absenteeism
- Reduced use of health care benefits
- Reduced workers compensation/disability
- Reduced injuries
- Lower health care costs

## Transforming corporate culture

When you think about it, the success of any facet of your business can almost always be traced back to motivated employees. From productivity and profitability to recruiting and retention, healthy, hardworking, and happy employees lead to triumph and growth. The best companies do more than just issue paychecks to their employees. . . *they improve life in the workplace.*

The Wellness Councils of America report that more than 81% of businesses with 50 or more employees have some form of health promotion program. Most organizations are now offering wellness programs to offset the rising costs of health care. Many companies find that medical costs can eat up half of corporate profits, or more in some cases.

While several other methods have been studied (cost sharing or shifting, incentive-based programs and more), only workplace wellness programs stand out as the long-range answer for keeping employees well in the first place. Wellness in the workplace is health care reform that works.

## The bottom line

Every dollar invested in prevention could return substantial savings in medical treatment. By transforming the actual workplace environment into one having a positive effect on health and adopting a wellness program and offering lifestyle seminars, a company can take a leadership role in maximizing the health and well-being of every employee. Not only is this good for employees, but it can have a dramatic impact on a company's bottom line.

*LivWell Solutions is the creator of the LivWell WorkPlace™, an easy-to-implement solution utilizing wellness technologies designed to transform any workplace environment into one that promotes health. LivWell Solutions also offers workplace wellness programs and lifestyle seminars designed to educate management and employees on simple ways to reduce stress, improve health, increase productivity, and to control, reduce, or avoid many unnecessary health care costs. Contact Valerie Aloisio at 203.371.5040 or visit the LivWell Solutions website at: [www.livwellsolutions.com](http://www.livwellsolutions.com).*



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