To: Employers and Employees
From: Raïssa S. Sorgho
Re: Employers, Employees & Workplace Wellness Programs

Why: Workplace Wellness Programs Were

In recent decades the emergence of chorionic problems such as heart diseases and diabetes have reduced the quality of life of American while increasing healthcare costs throughout the nation. These “life style” diseases once thought to be only a problem for older age groups are now influencing working age men and women. Employers who increasingly face the financial burden of such chronic diseases and the reduced productivity of employees have created workplace wellness programs as a responsive preventative measure. Wellness programs strategically promote and support the health, safety and wellbeing of those in the program. Wellness programs are aimed at increasing positive healthy behaviours and aiding participants in making healthy life choices to support strong mental, physical and social wellbeing.

Who: Participated in Workplace Wellness program

Programs incorporate the participation of three parties. First the employer, second its primary insurance company and lastly the participating staff and employees. Programs can be created and structured for a wide range of groups. The creation of these wellness programs is facilitated through the health insurer the institution offers its employees. The program is aimed at improving the general health of employees and lowering healthcare costs per employees. The implementation of wellness programs occurs through a multitude of methods: the restructuring of health insurance plans, optional programs, incentives plans, and mandatory participation.

Why: Workplace Wellness programs could be a WIN:WIN:WIN

Ideally all three parties (employers, insurance companies and employees) benefit from a successful workplace wellness program. The employee participants have an incentive to take care of their health. They are provided multiple tests and screenings to detect and address medical problems early: in so doing employees can reduce there insurance deductibles. Insurance companies have increased financial costs upfront due to the administration of preventative tests and screenings but gain by avoiding exponentially more expensive treatments due to late detection
The employer gains from a successful wellness program because it assembles a healthier more productive workforce for its business and reduces financial health expenditures with healthier employees. Ideologically wellness programs are a win:win:win yet this is not the results reported after the implementation of most workplace wellness programs. When put into practice wellness programs are often deemed ineffective, inefficient and costly for an array of reasons.

**Difficulties of Workplace Wellness programs**

- The implementation of all new programs health, administrative or financial is always be met with resistance, as employees are reluctant to change their habits.
- There is a schism between the creators of the plans and the participants. This leads to an understanding gap, as the structure of the program maybe too complex and incomprehensive to the targeted participants.
- Wellness programs can be added stress and pressure to employees are unable to comply with the changes.

**Critiques of Workplace Wellness Programs**

- The effectiveness of these programs is questionable as they yield undesirable results.
- This has been coined a discriminatory reduction of costs because costs are simply shifted from “healthy” individuals in the program to the most vulnerable employees.
- The financial incentives, intended to entice behavioural changes in favour of healthy actions, become a punishment system.
- Financial incentives may not lead to the desired behavioural changes.
- Few reliable sources of literature assessing programs have been published.
- Workplace wellness programs which have been implemented have a high degree of variation
- Strong publication biases have been observed in wellness program literature.

Theoretically workplace wellness programs should be an effective and efficient tool in both improving the health of participating employees and reducing the overall cost of care for staff, employer and insurance companies. Unfortunately due to structural and systematic malfunctions
workplace wellness programs have yet to serve their designed purpose. Structured and continuous quantitative and qualitative research is essential to identify and address the malfunctions in workplace wellness programs. This is the first step to designing programs that will fulfil their intended aims.

For More Information See:

Title: Workplace wellness Programs Study Report: Final Report
Authors: Soeren Mattke, Hangsheng Liu, John P. Caloyeras, Christina Y. Huang, Kristin R. Van Busum, Dmitry Khodyakov, Victoria Shier
Institution: RAND Health
Sponsor U.S. Dep. of Labor and the U.S. Dep. of Health and Human Services

Title: Assessing the Evidence for Penn State University’s “Take Care of Your Health” Benefits Program
Authors: Dr. Dennis Scanlon, Ph.D. and Dr. Dennis Shea, Ph.D.
Institution: Pennsylvania State University