

News

Factory improves employee health through coaching

On-site nurses help adults monitor medical needs

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PK USA joined forces with Clinical Solutions LLC in 2003 with the goal of trying to gain control of burgeoning health care costs. Companies of all sizes share the dilemma of how to provide health care for their employees without double digit increases in premiums each year.

Bill Kent, vice president of corporate relations at PK, and Nancy Dayhoff, co-founder with Patricia Moore of Clinical Solutions, set up Wise Health Decisions within the plant to encourage healthier lifestyles among PK employees.

"I knew that the answer to lowering or at least controlling health care costs was finding ways to have a healthier work force," Kent said, "and Wise Health Decisions has made a real difference."

Kent said he finds statistics about health in Indiana highly disturbing. He listed several unsettling facts, including a statement that Indiana is considered No. 1 in the nation in the number of fast food restaurants, which he believes directly correlates to Indiana's high percentage of overweight children and adults.

"We are the fifth highest in number of people who smoke, fourth highest in cancer deaths, 11th in obesity and 12th in diabetes," he said.

Kent added that Indiana is very low in comparison to other states in preventative testing and ranks 44th in the number of people who receive annual physicals.

"The only way to help people get healthier is to change the the health choices that they make," he said.

Dayhoff agreed but noted that changes must come from the individual. Employees who take part in Wise Health Decisions meet with registered nurses who set up in PK's cafeteria. The employees are then tested using national standards for health risks for cholesterol, blood sugar, blood pressure and body mass index. People who are identified as low risk only need to see the visiting nurses every six months; moderate risk, every three months; high risk, every two months; and very high risk, every month. She added that if an employee is at risk for a disease and does nothing to moderate his or her lifestyle, the condition will probably develop.

"In order for employees to maintain a lower health care premium," Kent said, "they have to see the nurses as often as the nurses tell them to come in."



Registered nurse Nancy Dayhoff (right) is managing partner of Clinical Solutions LLC, which manages Wise Health Decisions at PK USA. She is taking the blood pressure of Margie Pope, information systems technology manager at PK. B.J. Fairchild-Newman photo

Dayhoff said once employees are identified as having an elevated risk to develop a disease such as diabetes or high blood pressure, the nurses can make suggestions on ways to lower their risk. She firmly believes that providing a plan for improving health is an important step for most people.

"A lot of people feel like they have no control over their health," Dayhoff said. "They don't understand that it is about lifestyle decisions. Employees actually make over 70 percent of decisions that affect healthcare costs associated with the prevention and control of chronic diseases."

PK employee Margie Pope is a believer. She said the on-site testing revealed that she was diabetic, and now she is working to control her blood sugar.

"Once we do our testing," Dayhoff added, "our coaching for small changes over time is the focus. Continued testing provides feedback."

Kent said when Wise Health Solutions was originally introduced, some employees were naturally skeptical and resentful of the company's involvement in their health decisions, but he believes that at this point, most of them appreciate the program. The program is still voluntary, but since 2007, the program has included the welcome incentive of a reduction in health premiums for people who lower their risks.

Today, 99 percent of PK employees participate in Wise Health Decisions, and in 2010, cash rewards for lowering risk levels and following a personal health improvement plan were added. The program was extended to spouses of employees this year, but children are not included because the nurses employed by Clinical Solutions do not have pediatric training.

"The employees feel proud when they lower their risk levels and improve their chances of avoiding a disease," Kent said. "Sometimes employees come up to me and tell me about their successes just because they are so proud of taking control of their own health."

Dayhoff said the visits by the Wise Health Decisions nurses are not intended to replace care by the employees' primary care physicians, but the consultations focus on prevention of disease through modifying behavior. Once the employee already has a chronic disease, such as diabetes or high cholesterol, the focus switches to helping them manage the disease.

"But the employee is always in control," Dayhoff said. "The nurses can only make recommendations."

All communication between the nurses and the employees is confidential; information is never shared with employers about an employee's health condition. Dayhoff tries to schedule the same nurses for each PK visit so that patients get to know and trust them. She looks carefully for nurses with the right personality and level of customer service to train as health coaches. Dayhoff hires only registered nurses instead of less qualified health care workers.

"Only RNs have the knowledge and skills in self-care management to staff the wellness clinics and instruct or coach employees to a healthier lifestyle," she said.

Kent added the confidentiality is essential because it is illegal to consider an employee's health when making hiring or firing decisions.

"I don't even want to know their risk levels," he said.

In addition to the health care savings for companies with healthier employees, Kent said absenteeism is reduced and productivity increases.

"You naturally work better when you feel better," he said. "People on the job are more engaged in what they are doing."

Dayhoff is confident that Wise Health Decisions can make a difference in the health of employees and create health care cost savings for employees and companies. In 2009, the program received the Edge Runners designation by the American Academy of Nursing, which recognizes innovative approaches to health care management.

Kent is also a believer. He said that in March to April 2009, 27 percent of PK employees tested in the very high risk category, but by July to December 2010, the percentage had dropped to 18 percent.

After hearing about the success of Wise Health Decisions at PK and Major Hospital, other companies were eager to contract with Clinical Solutions. Its clients include Nachi Technology and Endress + Hauser in Greenwood, Curtis Dyna-Fog in Westfield, Pacers Sports and Entertainment, Bowen Engineering Corp. and Aircom in Indianapolis plus Elkhart Community Schools.

For additional information about Wise Health Decisions programs through Clinical Solutions, contact Dayhoff toll free at (866) 231-3435.

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