

# Wellness Plans Cut Health Costs, Boost Morale

*Healthy employees, students cost less; nutrition plays a vital role*

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Companies' employee insurance costs are expected to rise by about 7% in 2010, management consulting firm Towers Perrin forecasts, as reported in *Business Week*, and that's before any additional costs resulting from health care reform.

Encouraging and providing support for employees' wellness is a way some companies are finding effective in holding down health insurance costs, as well as reducing absenteeism and improving morale and productivity. The companies that are most effective in managing their employees' health needs reduced their health care costs by as much as \$1,800 per employee, according to a Towers Perrin study, *Business Week* says.

Providing healthy foods and a nutrition focus in the company or campus dining center is a good way to further a wellness initiative.

## Wellness on Campus

Colleges and universities also are concerned about student health and well-being. Many feature healthy meals and nutrition information in their dining programs.

Last fall, Lincoln University in Pennsylvania attempted to attack the obesity problem by requiring overweight students to take a physical education class in order to graduate. After protests, the University reversed the requirement, but promotes a "Fitness for Life" course as an alternative.

At Notre Dame University, South Bend, IN, dietitian Jocia Antonelli conducts courses in nutrition and healthy eating topics for campus groups.

The University of California at San Diego's nutrition initiatives include "Meatless Mondays," featuring all-vegetarian meals in its dining halls on a rotating basis.

## Unhappy Employees

Just 45% of U.S. employees said they were satisfied with their jobs in 2009, according to a report by CNN. That's not surprising, given the uncertainty created by layoffs, cuts in benefits and other steps companies have taken to cope with the recession. Promoting wellness can be an effective antidote to improve morale.

Professional wellness consultants, such as Kersh Risk Management and Mayo Clinic Health Solutions, focus on preventing serious health risks like diabetes and cardio-vascular diseases.

"The baby boomer generation is getting older [but] workers are choosing to remain in the workforce longer," Kersh's website notes. "With increased age comes increased risk for health problems."

## Dining Service's Role

Roles for the on-site dining service, according to the website of Wellness Proposals, a company that connects clients with wellness consultants, include:

- Healthy food alternatives in the staff or student café and vending machines.
- Adequate facilities for preparation of healthy foods.

- “Lunch and learn” wellness seminars.
- Diet and nutrition information brochures.

But changing the eating habits of both the young and the old requires more effort. Most people select meals and snacks based on taste, with minimal concern for the list of nutrients – or their lack – in the foods. They have to learn to at least try healthier options and thereby acquire a preference for foods that are good for them as well as tasting good.

## **Strategies**

A nutrition education program will be far more effective if the foods and their benefits also are available in the dining center at the same time.

Strategies for gaining acceptance of healthier foods include:

- Making healthy foods and vegetarian dishes the features of each day’s menu.
- Eliminate, or at least reduce, and de-emphasize unhealthy foods.
- Provide healthier versions of familiar foods – low fat, whole grain, for example.
- Tie in the healthy eating initiative to your sustainability program. Buying local products, conserving resources and the like are interrelated issues that most people understand.
- Price is a primary consideration with most consumers. Price healthy choices lower than unhealthy items.

*Clarion will help integrate an effective healthy dining program into your wellness initiative through our new **Fresh & Natural** plan. For information, contact Tom Mac Dermott, president, 603/642-8011 or Angela Phelan, senior vice president, 973-544-6223 or e-mail us at [info@clariongp.com](mailto:info@clariongp.com).*