Behavioral Matters: Absence Management Programs Succeed When Employees Are Engaged

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Getting the best and brightest employees on the job and ready for work every day can generate results and push productivity. The strength of a company’s absence management program, coupled with its employees’ willingness to engage in their own health, is a measuring stick that can determine a company’s stability and long-term success.

According to a financial impact report by Mercer/Kronos, employee absence reaches far beyond the direct cost of overtime and hiring temporary employees to manage the void left by a missing employee. It can also reduce work output of co-workers by 22%.1

The good news is most employers are focusing on maintaining a workplace environment built on a foundation of health and wellness. In fact, 92% of employers with 200 or more employees reported offering wellness programs2 while 81% of employers with 500 to 999 employees and 94% of larger employers offer employee assistance programs (EAP) to help workforce mental health and productivity.3

The challenge is motivating people to become engaged in improving their own health. For example, many people do not get the amount of exercise recommended by their doctor. Regular exercise can help prevent injuries and lessen the challenges associated with chronic conditions. It has also been shown to boost the immune system, and help prevent diseases such as heart disease, Type 2 diabetes and obesity, while also improving mental health and helping prevent depression.
A comprehensive absence management program isn’t an “if we build it, they will come” strategy. Employees must also be willing to do the work. Many employers offer financial incentives through deposits into health accounts or reduced premiums, but it still comes down to employees choosing to eat healthier or make regular exercise part of their lifestyle.

When an individual takes a leave of absence due to a short or long term disability, tools to help guide them back to health often include behavioral health programs, vocational rehabilitation services and health coaching. The more involved the individual becomes, the greater the likelihood for a faster recovery and return to work.

It’s not unusual for vocational rehabilitation counselors to refer patients to exercise and training programs like those available through Achilles International, a non-profit with the goal of helping people with disabilities participate in mainstream athletic events. The level of encouragement that can be won through completing small but challenging goals can instill a renewed passion for returning to health. Also, the mental health impact combined with the physical improvements can make other parts of a person’s return to work program feel more attainable.

Employers can’t keep all disabilities and illnesses from occurring, but a comprehensive absence management program geared toward employee health and wellness, and designed to engage employees in their health, is the cornerstone to successfully preventing injuries or illnesses and maintaining a productive workforce. That’s a measuring stick everyone can appreciate.

References

   http://tinyurl.com/MercerKronos

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