

In Defense of Corporate Wellness

*Nancy Feiwei, M.D.
The Doctor's T.E.A.M., Inc*

Why would we want to have someone evaluate the health of our employees? Don't they have their own doctor?

These are just a couple of the queries I receive when I discuss corporate wellness with a potential, yet resistant client. As corporate wellness programs become more popular, business owners want to be sure their money is well spent. Although the literature speaks of a return on investment in the arena of 6 to 1, concrete evidence is challenging to demonstrate, and several benefits are indirectly quantifiable.

Yet, there are compelling reasons to have someone medically evaluate employees on a completely voluntary basis. First, if an employer values their employees, s/he wants them to be as healthy as possible, which means encouraging people to pay attention to their current medical status, identifying issues, and addressing concerns. Theoretically, people should be doing this with their own doctor; but, many do not actually go to the doctor. A 2012 U.S. Census Bureau report found 37% of people, 18- to 24-year old and 33% of men in any age bracket did not visit a health care provider during 2010. Moreover, large numbers of people (15% to 47%, depending on sex and ethnicity) do not have a primary care doctor, which means they do not have a medical profession to provide consistent care. Not having an ongoing doctor-patient relationship can be detrimental to one's health.

A corporate wellness program is not meant to replace a primary care physician. It is an effective way to fill in the gaps when employees are not regularly seeing a doctor; but, more importantly, by detecting an existing issue or health risk, a wellness professional can encourage employees to make an appointment with a medical doctor. Corporate wellness is more than just promoting healthy food and exercise. It is incumbent that providers of this valuable service are medically-trained professionals who can provide education on healthy lifestyle choices, identify potential health concerns, and encourage individuals to take charge of their well-being. Doctors, nurses, and nutritionists are examples of healthcare professionals ideally suited to run a corporate wellness program. So, why hire a corporate wellness company and offer this benefit to your employees? Ultimately it serves the bottom line...healthier employees are more productive, happier, and present. Not only is it the right thing to do for your employees, it is the right thing to do for the financial well-being of your company.