

Wellness Programs

Practical Side of Preventive/Wellness Programs

A practical difficulty with the typical screening programs is that often no one knows what to do if an individual is found to have a predisease. Prostate cancer is an example of the problem; new blood screening techniques have uncovered a raft of new cases, but there is no agreement as to treatment at this stage. Screening tests often can produce false information and do not often reduce mortality, as for example, in the cases of breast cancer for those under 50 or in the case of high cholesterol readings. Screening results could also be used to deny employment or insurance. Screening's popularity is due partly to its profitability and the fact that it is often the focal point for special interest campaigns for particular diseases. The gap between the number of screening tests and available treatments is likely to widen with genetic advances. Cystic fibrosis screening is an example; the annual cost of screening five million couples would be \$500-\$600 million, or an average of \$2.2 million for each cystic fibrosis birth prevented.

Employer Wellness; No Pain-No Gain

Increasingly, employers are using health risk assessments and powerful incentives or disincentives to promote healthy lifestyles. Most employers base their wellness programs on medical tests such as cholesterol or blood pressure checks. Only a smaller percent use incentives and disincentives, such as charging smokers higher premiums, to modify risky or unhealthful behaviors. That percent is increasing, however. The following initiatives are also gaining in popularity: education or training programs, health risk appraisals or lifestyle questionnaires and on-site fitness facilities or videos.

Successful Program Ingredients

- Get senior management to buy into the concept
- Use powerful incentives
- Create a multidisciplinary task force
- Use a comprehensive risk appraisal
- Do marketing/promotion of the program
- Include the dependents.