

GOING BEYOND THE BASICS

Paying Close Attention to Prevention

By Charlee Beasor

Hillenbrand, Inc. has invested in health and wellness centers, as well as an acute care clinic and occupational therapy, to keep employees healthy.



A triple heart bypass. Pre-diabetes indicators. A pattern of high blood pressure.

Usually these are chilling signs that illustrate how dangerous it is to live an unhealthy lifestyle. In Indiana, we are well aware of the dangers of our choices, resulting in high percentages of obesity, diabetes, cancer and blood pressure challenges.

But there are also happy stories – health issues that were caught and corrected or managed through preventative on-site wellness centers and coaching at companies around the state.

Batesville's Hillenbrand, Inc. (home to Batesville Casket Company), has gone all-in on workplace wellness with health and wellness centers, acute care services and occupational medicine.

"Where we are now is more preventative – we look at options and opportunities in wellness, not just getting you well, but getting you well and taking you one step further. Coaching that actually hands you your plan of action that is independent of anybody else's plan of action, reviewed monthly," exclaims Lisa Werner, RN, health and wellness specialist at Hillenbrand.

One of those success stories at Hillenbrand was a man who had become comfortable with an on-site physician through just having the doctor sit and get to know him. He had come in complaining of flu-like symptoms, saying he wasn't feeling well. The doctor ordered a stress test and the man had a triple bypass three days later.

"What started out as a return on investment has become a cost avoidance," Werner shares.

There's a difference

Health and wellness centers (sometimes called on-site clinics) with a coaching component are a growing trend in workplace wellness. It may not be the right fit for every organization, depending on several factors. If, for instance, the majority of health costs are coming from remote workers or spouses and dependents, an on-site situation for employees might not achieve the desired results.

Jamie Curts, vice president of business development for Spectrum Health Systems, points to a tailored approach for wellness, no matter if an organization has an on-site clinic. The independent health management company provides health and wellness services to clients in Indiana and across the country.

"Groups that I've seen that have very high amounts of overweight employees, most of those individuals are not going to change their weight through an online program; can we do something more personal (for them)?" Curts contends.

Marrying wellness programs with an on-site clinic focused on preventative health can make an impact in the right situation, says Kristin Vargo, senior general manager of QuadMed (formerly Novia CareClinics).

"I think the key there is integration. So often, employers are doing some sort of stand-alone wellness program with biometric screenings, health risk assessments, and then they have a freestanding clinic over there where people need to go when they have the flu," she explains.

“It goes back to treating the whole patient. Our patient is your employee. Are we just in diagnosis mode and just treating the symptom? Or not really looking at digging deep and (finding out) what’s going on with the entire patient.”

Starts from the top

Mark Anderson realized in 2011 that he was unhealthy. As the director of human resources for TASUS Corporation, a plastic injection molder in Bloomington, he was trying to teach and coach other employees about the benefits of health and wellness – without success.

“I didn’t have much credibility. My heart was in the right place, but I finally woke up. If I’m going to talk it, I’ve got to live it. Every company needs that at the top of the organization – leadership that will model what they hope people will do,” Anderson states.

A camping trip with his sons that resulted in major back problems drove him to lose weight and focus on good health. He went from 305 pounds to 205 and has kept the weight off for three years.

“I haven’t felt this good since I was 18 years old. It’s gratifying. I see now that I have employees who come up to me all the time who talk to me about health and wellness. Before, that didn’t happen,” he explains.

The top-down support for health and wellness programming is of the utmost importance, Vargo adds.

“The reason a clinic would fail is there’s not encouragement and it’s not embedded in the culture from the top. (You need to) see the CEO wanting to use the clinic and accessing it and having support from middle management saying, ‘This is a part of our program now, we encourage you to use it,’” she says.

TASUS doesn’t have an on-site health and wellness clinic, but the company offers on-site fitness classes and is looking into defraying the costs for gym memberships for its employees. The on-site wellness programming with low- or no-cost pieces has made a big difference in the health of employees. And getting the families involved is so important, Anderson contends.

“If they leave (work) and go home and the environment they go into isn’t conducive (to good health) ... we try as much as possible to reach the family whenever possible and have them get involved,” he notes.

Making health care more efficient

As a manufacturing company, a focus on efficiency and lean practices translates to the health and wellness offerings at Hillenbrand.

“From an efficiency perspective, when we were looking at our own health care efforts, we know it can be done better than the way it’s done,” offers Chris Lowery, director of public policy and engagement for Hillenbrand. “Lean is about taking waste out of something. The premise of that is, with health care, it becomes more of an honoring of the individual.”

Someone who has to sit in a doctor’s office for over two hours to spend 10 minutes with a doctor is losing precious time in their day.

“We decided to flip the model on its head,” Lowery explains. “We have 20- and 40-minute segments for individuals to have appointments. Doctors don’t rush through. ... We wanted the experience to be really good for people, to have good relationships with their medical provider.”

An alternative to physician shortage?

With the convenience of an on-site clinic, does that encourage employees to discontinue seeing their own primary care physician?

“We never encourage replacing a primary care physician. We ask you to continue that. I would be interested to poll an employer and ask 100% of the population to name your primary care physician. Can you name one?” Vargo asks.

“We’re targeting that population that doesn’t have a named primary care provider, which are in a mass shortage now. We’re over 45,000 physicians short in the nation. We’re not asking you to not have a relationship outside of our setting, but access issues are going to become so real.”

Curts gives the example of one clinic setting in which the employees are incentivized to continue seeing their primary physician. “An incentive gets the people in the door, it gets us to meet them and know them. It doesn’t happen overnight; they’re untrusting. But once you’re there, the results will come.”

But targeting those people who have given up hope and are not seeing any physician is vital. Curts relays the story told to her by a nurse practitioner about a young diabetic man who had passed the point of caring about his health.

“He had given up all hope, he was not going to take his medication, not see the doctor. He fell out of compliance with the (on-site) program and the nurse practitioner was determined not to let him give up. So she continued to call him, continued to talk with him. It finally flipped his switch. He finally got back on track,” she says.



Mark Anderson, director of human resources for Bloomington’s TASUS Corporation, realized in 2011 that he needed to change his lifestyle – not only for personal health reasons, but also for legitimacy in explaining the benefits of good health and wellness to employees. Anderson lost 100 pounds and has kept it off for three years, as shown in these “before” and “after” photos with his family.

RESOURCES: Mark Anderson, TASUS Corporation, at www.tasus.com | Jamie Curts, Spectrum Health Systems, at www.spectrumhs.com | Chris Lowery and Lisa Werner, Hillenbrand, at www.hillenbrand.com | Kristin Vargo, QuadMed, at www.quadmedical.com