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Wellness Programs & Biometric Screenings Reducing Health Care Cost?

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Introduction

Many can argue that health care is a basic human right because we are living in a democracy. Unfortunately, in the United States, healthcare costs have skyrocketed and continue increasing at alarming rates. Today, health insurance coverage is a privilege and now employers are looking at early prevention and intervention of chronic disease to decrease their healthcare cost and positively impact their workforce. This is a common scenario when employers acknowledge that they are in a deficit and it's because their workforce is over utilizing the emergency rooms for non-emergent conditions or due to complications of preventable chronic diseases. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention & the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (2018), 90% of the nation's \$3.3 trillion annual health expenditures are from chronic health conditions. Medicine and science have successfully identified that unhealthy behaviors lead to increased cardiovascular disease and other chronic diseases. Cardiovascular disease principally heart disease and stroke rank first and third among the leading causes of death in the United States (Brown & Mensah, 2007). Some of these unhealthy behaviors are uncontrolled hypertension, obesity, smoking, and alcohol abuse. In recent years, there has been a better understanding of the importance of wellness programs and biometric screenings to identify high-risk individuals and appropriately intervene with behavior modification and appropriate diagnosis and treatment prevent chronic disease prevalence, thereby, reducing overall healthcare cost. According to Brown & Mensah (2007), through comprehensive worksite health promotion programs, lifestyle changes, and a renewed emphasis on adherence to established clinical guideline are necessary. With the implementation of wellness programs and biometric screenings, there is a potential to identify high-risk individuals and provide prevention and intervention methods to reduce healthcare cost. that prevention and early intervention within our healthcare system is the key to sustainable success in reducing healthcare cost and ultimately saving precious lives.

Nature of the Problem

In recent times, the United States has had a monumental rise in healthcare cost directly related to

complications of chronic diseases, either by hospitalizations or emergency room utilization (Joseforsky & Kocakulah, 2002). Medicine and science have acknowledged that chronic illnesses like diabetes mellitus, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, metabolic syndrome, obesity, and cancer are linked to unhealthy behavior and lifestyle. National health expenditures in the United States have climbed into over \$3 trillion and contribute to approximately \$126 billion in loss of productivity (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention & the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2018). Evidence-based medicine has established that prevention and early intervention is the key to a sustainable reduction in healthcare cost and employee health. Health is wealth.

Current Screening Methods

Many workplaces in the United States with 50 or more employees have health promotion programs (Aldana, Merrill, Price, Hardy, & Hager, 2004). Physiological makers like hemoglobin A1C, fasting blood sugars, fasting cholesterol panels, waist circumference, body mass index, and blood pressure are some of the current screening tools used in wellness programs and biometric screenings.

Clinical Purpose

Wellness and biometric screening programs are becoming a popular method for the prevention and detection of illness among employees in the United States. The early identification of disease allows for protection and treatment of the employee and helps lower overall health care cost. Most importantly, it will also help healthcare providers and employers understand the value of wellness programs and biometric screenings for employees and its impact on local, state, and national healthcare delivery systems.

Review of Literature

Two major concepts explored in this paper are wellness and healthcare cost. Specifically, an organized review of the literature reveals the relationship between wellness programs and biometric

screenings and the potential of reducing healthcare cost. Health and wellness with reduction of healthcare cost is considered to be the future direction of healthcare. More civil, industrial, and private employers are examining wellness programs and biometric screenings in an attempt to reduce overall healthcare cost. According to Angelo (2004), "Its wellness program has reduced the open shop firms' burgeoning health-care cost" (p.13). Angelo (2004) found "health-care costs are directly related to chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart and lung problems, which are mostly preventable through healthier living" (p.13). Furthermore, "research suggests that these costs are largely preventable, behavioral and environmental factors account for more than 70% of avoidable mortality, and preventable chronic diseases account for 75% of all direct healthcare costs in the United States (Murphy, Schoenman, & Pirani, 2010).

Kocakulah and Joseforsky (2002) found that a large manufacturer with 61,000 employees "has not been as successful in managing its healthcare costs" (p.26). In a novel attempt to reduce healthcare cost over a period of time, the large manufacturer focused on controlling healthcare cost to improve company profits. This article identifies that there is a significant number of unnecessary visits to the ER and that "eliminating unnecessary visits to the Ers could result in a savings of \$130,900 per year for the division" (p.28). The article goes on to explain the reasons why there is wealth in wellness. Kocakulah and Joseforsky (2002) provided these following wellness program strategies; (a)hire a healthcare advocate from a local hospital to promote wellness, (b)continue offering company-sponsored physicals, (c)continue offering an annual health fair, and (d)improve communication regarding health and wellness. Moreover, they go on to describe "Wealth in Wellness, is demonstrated in two ways--improved health and lower medical costs" (p.30). Other researchers identified the following as vital components of wellness programs; (a) health risk assessment, (b)onsite biometric screening, (c)education tools, (d)targeted programming, (e)health coaching, (f)professional health support, (g)environmental consultation, and (h) a full-time equivalent staff member dedicated to employee wellness (Murphy, Schoenman, & Pirani, 2010).

As our healthcare system continues to incur cost at alarming rates, it has become a trend to implement novel wellness programs and biometric screenings to attempt to reduce healthcare cost and provide maximal patient satisfaction and the prevention of chronic disease. Research has shown that wellness programs reduce cost and that health insurers are leading the trend in employee health and wellness in the United States. “Health insurers are poised to take wellness programs to the next level of integrated health management. Experts agree that fragmented healthcare is one of the primary causes of poor health outcomes, and they call for greater coordination or integration of care as a necessary solution (Murphy, Schoenman, & Pirani, 2010). In order to understand the relationship between wellness programs and reduced healthcare cost, you have to be able to visualize the multiple factors that affect both sides of the equation. In this research article, the primary focus is on the financial impact of a comprehensive health promotion program. This particular article measured healthcare cost savings with confounding variables, like absenteeism. “These savings translate into a cost savings of US\$15.6 for every dollar spent on programming (Aldana, Merrill, Price, Hardy, & Hager, 2005). Furthermore, this study with a particular school district measured the financial impact that a variable like absenteeism can cost an organization. It also described the importance of translating that into a dollar amount to evaluate the cost savings. This goes on to prove that civil, industrial, health insurers, and private employers are looking for novel approaches to implement wellness programs and novel methods to calculate the healthcare cost savings.

Discussion

One of the main reasons employee wellness programs and biometric screenings exist in the first place is to reduce overall healthcare cost. In the United States, there is more convincing scientific data to suggest that wellness programs and biometric screenings improve employee health, identify and reduce high-risk health-related behaviors, and reduce overall healthcare cost. There is a direct correlation between health behaviors and healthcare cost. Currently, providing health care benefits is a large burden on employers in

the United States (Murphy, Schoenman, & Pirani, 2010). Employers are experiencing direct and indirect factors that influence overall healthcare cost including but not limited to absenteeism, presenteeism, and disability. Employers are beginning to understand that these costs are heavily attributed to preventable, behavioral, and environmental factors. Most importantly, employers have begun to focus on preventable chronic disease like diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and metabolic syndrome; which encompass 75% of all direct health care cost in the United States (Murphy, Schoenman, & Pirani, 2010). In response to such drastic numbers, employers have begun to implement employee wellness programs, biometric screenings, health education, and health prevention to decrease health care spending and protect the health and wellbeing of their employees.

Conclusion

The health and wellness of the United States workforce is currently under attack. Chronic diseases are highly prevalent in the United States workforce and are responsible for atrocious healthcare cost for employers. diseases attributed to high-risk health behaviors, physical inactivity, alcohol use, smoking, and poor nutrition are the major culprits. The most prevalent chronic diseases in the United States are cardiovascular disease and diabetes mellitus. Recently, there has been an effective strategy of reducing overall health care cost by the implementation and delivery of employee wellness programs and biometric screenings that help identify high-risk individuals. The early identification and health intervention of these individuals within the United States workforce is reducing the overall health care cost and ultimately preserving lives.

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