

Healthy investment

Research shows Well Being programs are good for employees, as well as the business *By Susan Birkholtz*

Almost \$1 billion of the estimated \$2.4 billion that Boeing will spend in 2010 on health care is due to conditions linked to health risks employees have some control over, including physical inactivity, tobacco use and poor nutrition.

That's big bucks. And it's why the many Well Being offerings Boeing provides figure prominently into the company's strategies for driving down health care costs in order to remain competitive in this challenging business environment.

"We want all our employees to focus on improving their health, whether that means losing weight, quitting tobacco, eating more nutritious foods, managing their stress more effectively or starting an exercise program," said Rick Stephens, senior vice president, Human Resources and Administration.

"All of us, no matter how healthy and fit we may be, have something about our physical or emotional health that could be improved."

Stephens pointed out that even employees who have chronic health conditions can take steps to manage those conditions more effectively, such as participating in a condition management program, either through OptumHealth or their health plans.

"The payoff is twofold—improved quality of life for our employees, as well as reduced health care and disability costs for the business," Stephens said.

Recent research underscores his point: Encouraging employees to maintain or improve their health and effectively manage chronic health conditions can be effective in keeping down health care costs. This is true not only for the company but also for employees in terms of coinsurance and other out-of-pocket expenses, which many Boeing employees are going to pay for the first time in 2011.

A study by Highmark, a 12,000-employee health insurer based in Pittsburgh, speaks to the savings potential of corporate wellness and related programs. Highmark measured the return on investment of its various employee wellness, preventive and condition management programs over four years, from 2001 through 2005. Medical claims for 1,900 Highmark employees who participated in its wellness programs were compared with the claims of employees with similar health risks who did not participate.

The findings, published in the February 2008 *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, showed that the company saved \$1.3 million over those four years, mainly because its annual health care expenses for participating employees were \$176 lower per employee. Highmark's total expenses for its wellness programs were \$808,958 over the same time period, yielding a return of \$1.65 for every dollar spent on wellness initiatives. Although the study did not measure it, participating employees likely saved on out-of-pocket costs as well.

Such results may help explain why more than 60 percent of U.S. companies with 10,000 or more employees have a wellness program, up from 47 percent in 2005, according to a 2008 MetLife survey.

Boeing has a tradition of supporting employee health and well-being that reaches back at least 25 years. Today, the company provides employees with access to an ever-growing number of Well Being programs, tools and resources—online, via telephone and in person. Based on the dozens of Boeing employees who have come forward to tell their stories over the years, these programs have transformed—and in some cases, even saved—lives. And since just 2006, these programs are estimated to have saved the company and its employees more than \$145 million—several times what Boeing invested in Well Being during this time.

"By improving the health of the work force and reducing what we spend on health care, Boeing will be able to use that money to invest in our people, products and services and, most important, remain competitive," said Stephens. "It's a win-win for everyone." ■

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For more information on Well Being programs, tools and resources that support employees' efforts to mitigate or eliminate preventable health risks and effectively manage existing chronic health conditions, visit <http://wellbeing.web.boeing.com> on the Boeing intranet.

PHOTO: Mary Wolf, director, Boeing Defense, Space & Security Manufacturing Quality, El Segundo, Calif., completed her first marathon and triathlon in her 40s. "My body is in the best shape ever," she said.

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