

Creating a Culture of Health by Engaging the C-Suite and Employees to Promote Better Health

LAURA GREENE: This is Laura Greene for the Healthcare Intelligence Network. Today I am speaking with Dr. Gregg Lehman, president and CEO of HealthFitness. Gregg is presenting at HIN's audio conference on, "Creating a Culture of Health by Engaging the C-Suite and Employees to Promote Better Health." Welcome, and thanks for joining me today Gregg.

GREGG LEHMAN, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF HEALTHFITNESS: Thank you.

LAURA GREENE: To begin, what level of involvement does HealthFitness consider as C-suite support, verbal encouragement and support, actual involvement in the initiatives, both or some other factors? In your experience how willing are executives to participate in the wellness program?

GREGG LEHMAN: Well I feel that C-suite support is all about leadership and endorsement of health management programs from the top down. And it's in my opinion very essential for optimal program success. It starts with verbal encouragement and support such as a newsletter from the CEO, email articles to the employees, videos that the CEO makes at employee meetings, or just general letters of support for programs that a company employee benefit package is. A lot of employers like to do this as part of open enrollment in the fall. I like to see executives become active participants of the program and I expect them to share their success stories. And I've found that when executives do that personally by having skin in the game, or also recognize employees who are working to improve their health status and align incentives for participation the programs are usually much, much more successful than CEO's that do not actively take place in different initiatives around the company. So I really feel that comprehensive C-suite support is a multifaceted and something that we call a corporate culture of health. It's got

to be an organizational commitment to employee health that includes corporate mission, rewards, incentives for employee participation in health management programs, aligning policies and procedures within the company and even environmental factors that support good health. If I may I'll just give you a couple of examples of what I've seen that works?

LAURA GREENE: Sure.

GREGG LEHMAN: Corporate mission and vision statements that support employee health and wellbeing, I think that's vitally important. I mentioned encouraging workers to participate through financial incentives and easy access to programs while they're at work, not just off worksite. I also like to see an integrated approach to managing employee health programs and aligning previously segmented functions like health risk assessments, worker's comp, overall risk management, employee assistance programs, long term disability, occupational health, and of course disease management programs. And then another thing I'd like to point out is that doing an annual assessment of a worker's base line health status through a confidential health risk assessment, and usually biometric screenings are very important as well. So the company can see with certain types of health management initiatives are the programs really doing what the vendors indicate that they'll deliver, and more importantly is there a positive return on investment from the first year going forward. And just a couple of more examples, employees that have been in the programs the company offers such as an employee health committee or task force usually works very well at engaging employees and it's peer to peer which is also important in addition to C-suite support. And then ongoing organized programs such as fitness programs, prevention programs, things like flu shots, ergonomic screening, self care education programs, health fairs, different things like that seem to work as well. And then I like environmental factors, such as no smoking policy or healthy food choices in the cafeteria working

with vendor's food service vendors and even what goes into the vending machines. So the bottom line Laura is as the cost of health benefits continues to increase many times faster than the rate of inflation smart and committed CEOs and even CFOs know that reducing the risk factors for chronic disease in the workforce is one of the best long term investments they can make.

LAURA GREENE: Okay, thanks Gregg. Do you enlist employees to serve as wellness champs to propel your initiatives? If so how effective is this technique?

GREGG LEHMAN: I think that's a great question Laura. Part of the vision for a culture of health is to start with obviously the C-suite for active program support as I mentioned previously and then to enlist managers all across the corporation to carry the message of employee health through the ranks. Identifying the company's natural leaders even grass roots leaders in the employee population is also the key to building program momentum, and keeping the momentum going throughout the year. Now these are employees who cast the vision of the health management program, are enthusiastic participants themselves and who can pull others along with them. One of the things that we do at health fitness, one of our unique features is our physical presence at most of our client sites. We have HealthFitness associates as we call them, our employees, staffing more programs at the work site, across the country, playing an active role in the client company environment while implementing programs, helping our clients develop a corporate health management strategy, managing fitness and recreational centers, operating occupational health and rehab programs and so forth. So it's really helpful to have real people with feet on the ground whose focus is making these programs successful within the company culture. So yes, I'm a great advocate of that.

LAURA GREENE: Okay, thanks Gregg. 25% of all health costs are preventable. With that statistic in mind are your initiatives

prevention based or geared more towards managing chronic conditions? Do you address the unhealthy lifestyle choices and behaviors that already exist in employees or manage pre-existing conditions?

GREGG LEHMAN: I think that's a great question. And actually Laura, the number we see most often is that preventable illnesses make up about 70% of the actual burden of illness and the associated costs. And that's something our listeners may want to refer to from the New England Journal of Medicine and that goes way back to 1993. So the number is unfortunately a lot higher than 25%. But, in that regard it makes sense when you consider that the CDC estimates, 1 in 5 annual deaths is attributable to smoking alone, which is just mind boggling. And then the National Center for Health statistics estimates 30% of American adults age 20 or over, that's about 60 million people are obese. In 2000 alone the total cost of obesity was estimated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to be about \$117 billion. So we've got a long way to go and the question is, what can we do about this?

One of the things that our company does at HealthFitness is designs, deploys and directly manages health management programs across a large health continuum. So that's really a pretty broad spectrum. But it starts with those who are at low or no risk. We really try to keep them at low or no risk and then goes through medium risk to high risk, all the way to those already filing health claims and in need of some type of chronic condition management. So it's really more of what I call a population based model that I think is important. And we can help our clients manage the total population health picture, and I think that's what the market is looking for today. So you have to work as a vendor in partnership with your clients. You have to understand their culture, you have to seek and identify the risk factors through that employee health risk assessment and biometric screening that I mentioned earlier, and then design implement and

manage programs that address that specific population's top health management needs.

One of my co-presenters for our conference in December is Eastman Chemical Company. And about 87% of their employees completed a health risk assessment back in 2005 and if I look at the data in the aggregate, we designed a program that invited employees to participate in the "Healthy Steps Management Program," that's a walking program where they keep track with a pedometer. That program emphasized reducing their highest health risk in this case the top 5 were high cholesterol, high body mass index, high glucose levels which would be pre diabetes, and a need to improve their dietary intake and improve fitness. But, it also included other factors that we identified in the risk assessment. What's really impressive is that the results were just wonderful. When almost 92% of the Eastman employees took a health risk assessment and biometric screening the next year in 2006 we found that these "Healthy Steps" participants overall had a 41.5% reduction in cholesterol levels alone. That's really impressive. They also saw improved blood pressure and BMI levels. There was nearly a 62% improvement in exercise levels and most importantly there was a significant improvement in productivity and job satisfaction, which I haven't mentioned before, but I think employers are not just looking at reducing claims costs, but improving the productivity of their workforce by keeping them healthy. And those that do have health risks or disease, to modify those health risks and keep them more active and out of the hospital.

LAURA GREENE: Okay, thanks Gregg. And finally you sort of touched upon this briefly in an early question, but what kinds of difference do you see in participation when initiatives are backed by the C-suite compared to those that are not endorsed?

GREGG LEHMAN: Well it's not an easy question to answer with kind of a silver bullet. Obviously, I'm a big believer in C-suite

initiatives and C- suite involvement, but there are also a number of variables that we'll talk about in our program that effect program outcome. For example, use of incentives, application of aggressive employee communications programs can spell failure or success for a program, C-suite and overall corporate support and corporate leadership, all of these things really heavily influence your participation rates. Jus talking about Eastman again, their participation rates, particularly in the health risk assessment do exceed national averages. And our averages in our database and that's in large part attributed to superb C-suite support.

LAURA GREENE: Okay, those are all the questions I have for you today Gregg. Thanks for being with us and we're looking forward to hearing from you during the audio conference.