



So You Took My Blood – Now What?

Most employers understand the value of providing employees with blood analysis as part of a corporate wellness program. A thorough blood profile offers employees an excellent snapshot of their current health based on acceptable ranges for cholesterol, lipids, glucose, and other blood components. And most wellness providers offer some educational literature or consultation following a blood profile to help employees understand their results.

But then what? Employees have results from their blood profile, a cursory overview of what those results mean, and maybe a pat on the back from a wellness vendor. How does that lead to healthier employees and reduced healthcare expenses? And how can employers know whether or not the money invested on blood profiles is making an impact?

Leveraging Data from High Risk Employees

With blood profile information – and hopefully additional biometric data, such as weight, blood pressure, waist circumference, and BMI – wellness professionals are poised to help you take your employee wellness program to the next level. But before you can foster a true culture of wellness, you must first address the sickest employees on your payroll.

Morbid obesity is the most expensive chronic condition in the United States, costing employers more than \$1,800 per calendar year more than their non-obese coworkers. Even smokers cost less (typically \$1,200 per calendar year more than non-smokers). The obesity epidemic will continue to deplete employer healthcare reserves and lead to increased insurance premiums unless individual employers can leverage the data they gain from wellness screenings.

A combination of blood profile results and biometric data can clearly identify high risk individuals who have metabolic syndrome, a condition marked by five distinct risk factors. So here's the key question: ***How are you targeting these high risk individuals to ensure that their risks are reduced by the time you draw their blood again next year?***

Follow-Up Programming that Works

If you have no plan in place to help high risk individuals reduce or eliminate their risk factors, your wellness plan is missing the most important piece. Consider this:

- Although obese individuals are aware of their weight, they are often unaware of the risk factors caused by obesity – or how to eliminate those risks
- Individually-driven diet and exercise plans are only 30% effective at reducing weight and the risk factors associated with obesity

- Employer-sponsored wellness initiatives without follow-up programming – such as a yearly blood screening – provide no impetus for change and no means to initiate it
- Individualized health coaching, coupled with employer support, will dramatically improve employees' efforts to reduce weight and risk factors associated with obesity
- Metabolic syndrome is curable – and curing an employee from metabolic syndrome will ***cut their annual healthcare spending in half***

A Sample Plan

Rely on your wellness provider to offer the extended support and programming necessary to effectively engage high risk employees. It starts by identifying employees with metabolic syndrome and inviting them to participate in a voluntary follow up plan. Most studies show that incentives for participation are very important, so be prepared to front some cash to get these folks to attend the initial sessions. But once they become engaged in the plan, very few will want to quit, regardless of any incentives involved.

A basic follow-up plan includes scheduling four or five personal, one-on-one sessions with a certified health coach. These professionals use proven methods to help employees understand their choices, set reasonable goals, and begin making strides to obtain them. A health coach is key in providing the most crucial element of any change plan: Accountability.

Employees should be given work time to meet with their health coach in a private, on-site location to facilitate scheduling and eliminate no-shows. Employees should also be held accountable for participation, especially when incentives are included. And employees must agree to submit to further screenings upon request – most good follow-up plans will screen high risk participants halfway through the program and again when the program concludes. This is above and beyond the annual screening offered to all employees.

With additional screenings and multiple coaching sessions, employees will make progress toward reducing or eliminating their risk factors. At Iowa Health - Des Moines, for example, over half of the employees who voluntarily participated in a high risk follow-up program were cured of metabolic syndrome after 1 year.

So What Now?

All corporate endeavors require periodic evaluation. Consider your employee wellness program in the same light. Are you making progress toward reducing your overall healthcare expenses? Is your aggregate employee data improving year over year? Are a small percentage of high risk employees wreaking havoc on your health claims?

Partnering with a wellness provider to implement a focused follow-up plan can make all the difference. Otherwise, you're only collecting data for the sake of collecting data. Isn't it time you actually did something with it?