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New 'Guidance' For Wellness Plans

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With more than half of large employers now offering on-site biometric screenings, the process is coming under increasing scrutiny.

So, what makes for a successful program?

Researchers from three national health groups -- the Health Enhancement Research Organization, the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine and the Care Continuum Alliance -- have come up with an answer.

In brief, their research indicated the following were found in wellness programs that work:

- health risk identification tools;
- behavior modification programs;
- educational programs;
- changes to the workplace environment and culture.

Screenings typically include such health care measures as height, weight, blood pressure and cholesterol levels, which are tracked over time.

In a statement released by the three organizations, a successful biometric testing program was described as one that is "part of a comprehensive health management program, prioritizing the health and wellbeing of employees, specifically designed with targeted goals, and evaluated for effectiveness and engagement."

"Survey responses from more than 600 employers indicate companies that offer biometric screening in the context of a comprehensive workplace wellness program that fosters a supportive culture, leadership support and strong employee communications realize better health (37 percent reported greater health risk improvement) and financial outcomes (34 percent reported lower health care trend) than those that offer biometric screening alone," they said.

Thus, a crucial element that may be missing from some wellness program is that integration with a company's business objectives, and support from the top.

The organizations said their work led to "new guidance" for creating and implementing a company biometric screening program. They looked at a range of issues in developing their guidelines, including:

- the use of specific health measurements such as body mass index (BMI) and body fat;
- comparison of methods for blood testing;
- the impact of state and federal regulations on biometric screening;
- how best to staff and run a screening program;
- the use of vendors for delivery of screening services;
- the evaluation of program effectiveness;
- methods for employee engagement, including communication strategies; data reports; and the use of incentives to encourage participation in wellness programs.

"Tools like a biometric screening and health assessment provide immediate feedback to the individual and the organization, and can be used to keep employees engaged in long-term health improvement if done properly," said Jerry Noyce, president and CEO of HERO. "The biometric screening guidance helps companies achieve this goal."

The full report can be found here on the ACOEM website.

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