

MOVING WELLNESS, DISABILITY MANAGEMENT AND ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS THROUGH COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: The merging of Disability Management, Workplace Wellness and Attendance Management programs can offer employers, employees and industry professionals the opportunity to maximize the benefits of each of these programs offers individually and move the industries to the next level.

Generally, Workplace Wellness, Disability Management and Attendance Management programs are seen as separate programs, offering individual benefits to organizations and employees. Empirical data used to identify the return on investment may infer the additional potential gains associated with potentially crossing these industries, however, rarely do programs co-exist, working symbiotically towards the benefit of all stakeholders.

Forward thinking in Disability Management, and even in Wellness, would have industry leaders working on the development of programming and the margining of best practices of these types of programs to demonstrate definitive benefits and support the buy in of all stakeholders.

Taking a minute to review what this could potentially look like would require a review of the philosophies of each of these programs. In the Workplace Wellness industry, "wellness" is seen as a continuum, ranging from healthy, or well, to unhealthy, or unwell. States of disability are not defined as being unhealthy. The importance in this field is the direction on the continuum that the person is pointing. One could therefore be healthy, but unwell, or unhealthy, but well (Travis, J. & Ryan, R. S., 2004).

When studying Disability Management Programs, the focus to employers is minimizing the cost of disability, no matter how transient or long term, that disability may be. (National Institute of Disability Management and Research). By developing programs that support employees during periods of illness or injury, employees receive benefits that range from safe and successful return to work after periods of disability, to supportive income replacement benefits to minimize the financial hardship caused by their inability to work at their pre-disability state (Benjamin C. Amick, Habeck, R., Hunt, A., Fossel, A.H., Chapin, A., Keller, R.B. et al., 2004).

Employers often are able to understand the clear connection between Attendance Management programs and Disability Management (in this case referring to Short Term or Long Term Disability programs), and as such, are often willing to make the additional investment for these programs.

The delay in the advancement of either and all of these industries lies in the fact that although each of them offers the similar goals and outcomes to the pursued benefit of the stakeholders, they are often implemented in isolation of each other, thus limiting the true benefits that could potentially be available. The question is, what processes can be developed to allow the communication of these isolated "departments" to work as a single body?

Wellness Programs developed through best practices would include the identification of the populations' major health risks, readiness for change and preferred interests. Developing a Wellness Program based on best practices has already identified benefits and returns to all stakeholders. However, difficulties with Wellness Programs include the barriers to engaging all populations, specifically those who are most at risk and most reluctant to change. Disability Management programs offer excellent potential participants for Wellness Programs. Employees returning from absences due to short or long periods of disability may be at a crucial readiness for change. By offering these employees questionnaires to identify their readiness to change, employees could be triaged into Wellness Programs to support the minimization of their risk factors, thus minimizing periods of future potential absences. Attendance Management programs also provides the opportunity to identify employees who are ready for change, or who suffer from medical conditions that can potentially lead to short or long term absences.

By developing strategies that will ensure communication amongst all programs, organizations could potentially see large changes from the support of employees through the entire wellness and disability continuums (Lovato, Chris Y, 1990).

References:

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