

CITY OF COLUMBIA EMPLOYEE HEALTH WELLNESS PROGRAM

by Dixie Darnell

Columbia, Missouri, home to the University of Missouri, lies in the center of the state along the I-70 corridor. Columbia is not a large metropolitan area, but for a City of 80,000 it is considered a progressive City with many parks, trails, medical facilities and educational institutions. Additionally, the City maintains and operates a transit system, railroad and airport. There is no doubt the people who live and work in the community are immeasurable assets to the City's success, but what about the 1,100 men and women whose job it is to keep all facets of the City running smoothly? Consider what would happen if the streets, sewers, water, electricity, garbage or parks were not tended 24/7. In an effort to enhance the work performance and well-being of the City's staff, the city of Columbia decided upon a unique approach and created Employee Health (EH) in 1992. The initial program focused on drug and alcohol testing requirements for DOT regulated positions and physical requirements for bus drivers, fire fighters and police officers.



Health screening programs are an efficient and cost effective method of providing medical evaluations to an audience who may not include exams as part of their health care regimen.

Since then, Employee Health has progressively expanded the services offered to City employees. Within the last several years, the focus has expanded to include preventive health and education programs. The mission of Employee Health is to promote longevity, quality of life and assist employees to become better informed and proactive in their health care and lifestyle choices, while contributing to reduced health care costs to the City. This, as the desired result, will make our employees and the community we serve winners!

The programs offered by Employee Health are determined by several factors: 1) age of the workforce; 2) nature of the labor employees provide; 3) type and frequency of medications prescribed through the prescription drug portion of the medical plan; 4) results from health screens; and 5) interests of employees expressed through surveys.

Education

A constant challenge is reaching our employees since many do not have access to e-mail or they are out on job sites which are scattered throughout the City. Then there are the schedules to keep, such as the refuse and transit routes. A method was needed to get information to the employees. One means proved valuable. At each work site, EH mounted wall racks housing a variety of informational pamphlets on health topics that brings information to the employees' fingertips. Another approach, and a great deal more personal, is taking the pro-

grams to the work site. The monthly employee newsletter includes an article from EH on upcoming programs and health topics of interest to employees.

A host of programs and presentations are brought on site by the EH staff



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and guest presenters. Some of our programs include presentations on back safety; working in the cold and the heat; prostate cancer; Hepatitis A, B and C defined; drug and alcohol disorders; benefits of a good night's sleep; and the value of humor in adversity. Several educational programs also are coordinated through the EH office. "Trim Within" a once-a-week, month long nutrition and weight loss class led by a registered dietician teaches better choices. "Smoke Stoppers" is another class offered to those who wish to quit smoking. These classes are scheduled over lunch for optimum participation.

Every October, Breast Cancer Awareness is observed. EH travels to the work sites and passes out pink ribbons, pamphlets and shower tags demonstrat-



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ing self breast exams and testicular exams. The Great American Smoke Out is recognized each November. Once again, EH travels to work sites and distributes "survival kits" containing gum, suckers, mints and fruit along with a calculator that explains the medical effects of smoking and totals the monetary expense of smoking. These efforts have proven to be well received and an enjoyable means of conveying the message.

Always looking for new and qualitative approaches to serve the commu-

nity, the city of Columbia purchased automatic external defibrillators to place in City buildings. Employee Health is currently coordinating CPR/AED classes for over 200 City employees who have volunteered for the training.

Immunizations

Every fall, flu shots are offered on site throughout the City for employees who roll up their sleeves. Over 700 flu shots are given annually. Hepatitis B series are provided to all employees who are most likely to risk an exposure. This spring Employee Health will be on site to offer Tetanus immunizations. All immunizations are free to the employees.

Health Fair

Every May, EH hosts a City-wide health fair which is part of employee "Wellness Week." We have enjoyed enthusiastic participation from our local community as well as from departments within the City. Local gyms bring workout equipment; and weight loss center representatives, pharmacists and doctors attend to answer questions. Vision and hearing screens, diabetic screens, blood pressure checks, skin cancer screens, body fat analysis, cholesterol screens, ergonomic work centers, chair massages and lots of good healthy food are available. The fair is held two mornings at different locations within the City. A smaller "traveling" version hits the road the remainder of the week for employees who were unable to attend the "main" event. The health fair has grown to be well liked and has provided several hundred employees with vital health information and resources they may not have sought on their own initiative.

Health Screens

Small, on-site screenings are performed throughout the year by Employee Health that include: hypertension, diabetic, cholesterol screens and skin cancer screens. Employee Health, in partnership with our consulting physician and a local hospital, has provided more inclusive screenings to over 120 men and women in the past 1 1/2 years. The screens take approximately 30 to 45 minutes per person and are scheduled immediately after the workday so operations are not disrupted. Components of our health screens include: health risk appraisal, height/weight, blood pressure, multi-



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chemistry labs, ECG, skin cancer screen by a dermatologist, urinalysis, fecal occult blood and body fat analysis. Men over 40 receive the PSA test and digital rectal exam; women receive the TSH (thyroid stimulating hormone) test and pelvic exam with pap smear.

Health screening programs are an efficient and cost effective method of providing medical evaluations to an audience who may not include exams as part of their health care regimen. Our screenings have become a popular event as well as a beneficial means of early detection and prevention of major illnesses. To date, all the screenings have been at no cost to the employee.

Employee Health's role within the city of Columbia as well as our mission and purpose has changed significantly since 1992. For us to remain contributory and an asset, we must continue to research similar programs, poll our employees and interact with management to better understand operational needs. The future of our wellness programs promises to be filled with more challenges and hopefully more successes.

Note: The city of Columbia's Employee Health Program is located in the human resources department. Current staff of Employee Health includes two registered nurses and one support staff member who is also a certified nursing assistant. All EH staff are certified CPR/AED instructors. The program is funded as an internal service function through a "wellness fee" charged per employee to city department personnel services budgets. □

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