

Senior Level Endorsement and Participation

Health Services Advisory Group, Inc. (HSAG) is a diversified, Arizona-based quality improvement organization (QIO) with some 250 employees across the nation. It was established in 1979 by a group of medical professionals whose mission remains “to positively affect the quality of health care by providing information and expertise to those who deliver and those who receive health services.” Over the years, HSAG has been very successful in its endeavor and has positively impacted hundreds of thousands of Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries throughout the United States.

In November of 2008, with the assistance of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona (BCBS), HSAG recognized the need to do for its employees what it did for those throughout the nation: to positively affect the quality of our health. HSAG’s Wellness Campaign was born. Prior to this, HSAG had provided assorted activities for its employees in an effort to encourage them to make healthy lifestyle choices however, there was not an organized campaign.

In December, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) appointed the Executive Director of Human (ED HR) Resources as head of the company-wide Wellness Campaign and directed her to establish wellness activities to keep the campaign at the forefront of our daily activities. HSAG’s Quarterly Meeting was held in December and the Campaign was “kicked off.” The CEO personally invited all employees to participate in the campaign and “find out their numbers.” She stated that the three Executive Committee Members-- CEO, Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and the Chief Operating Officer (COO)-- would lead the way and have their numbers checked. All employees were informed of the opportunity to have their biometrics assessed and to complete a computer-based health risk assessment provided by BCBSAZ. E-mail reminders (see attached) were continually sent reminding all employees of the upcoming biometric screening. Flyers were hung in all public places and table tents were placed in the employee break rooms. The CEO personally read and approved all company-wide e-mails.

More than half of our employees arrived to receive their biometrics screening. The BCBSAZ staff, tasked with conducting the testing, stayed an extra hour just to accommodate all the employees who arrived to participate. Some employees had to be turned away due to the lateness in the day.

HSAG is very proud of its participation rate; especially considering that the **only** incentive provided our employees was the ability to dress casually and a drawing for one covered parking space for a month. We achieved a great deal of success just by marketing the importance of wellness... it just feels good.

The CEO and the ED HR presented information regarding the benefit of health coaches, diet and exercise during our recent all-employee quarterly meeting. Moreover, we anxiously await our BCBSAZ Health and Wellness company-wide report so that we may determine our “risk” and establish ways in which we can successfully assist our staff. Stay tuned ...

Organizational Structure

Any successful company-wide campaign is too big for any one person. Once appointed, the ED HR immediately recruited the HSAG Social Activities Committee (SAC). The SAC meets on a monthly basis and is responsible for organizing all company-wide social activities. SAC membership is diverse containing administrative level staff and executive level staff alike. Energy emanates from the HSAG social activities committee and the members immediately adopted the Wellness Campaign as their own mission. The head of SAC personally went around to all staff and assisted them with completing their computer-based training. Only a few arms were twisted. Again, no company incentives were provided. The theory was that getting healthy had to come from within or it wouldn't last.

All campaigns have to have a vision. Ours was to stem the tide of obesity and diabetes. With health care costs increasing on an average of 12-15 percent nationwide, HSAG had good reason to "get healthy." HSAG had begun this undertaking during 2008. We implemented an "At Work Program" through Weight Watchers. All told, HSAG staff lost over 550 pounds (see attached) during a one year period; with many staff meeting their goal of losing at least 10 percent of their body weight.

In addition to weight loss, many staff participated in a stress-reducing Friday lunch time yoga session. One of the staff at HSAG is a Bikram yoga certified instructor. For many months, he spent his Friday lunch with the staff of HSAG stretching them to their limits, both physically and mentally.

"10,000 Steps" is what it takes and HSAG staff is rapidly getting there. Many have formed lunch time walking clubs. Beginning at 11:30, HSAG pulls out the sneakers, visors and sunglasses and puts on our BCBS-provided pedometers. The current competition is to see who can get to 10,000 steps in a day. A little friendly competition has served our waistlines well. After all, we will be participating in the BCBS Walkathon and need to get in shape.

Weight loss and exercise comprise only two components of a wellness campaign. HSAG's campaign also has the much needed education component. On a monthly basis, HSAG receives a "Top Health" newsletter from our benefits administrator. Articles range from weight control to laughter as the best medicine. All articles are very timely to the season too. The monthly newsletter is posted on HSH Connect, HSAG's internal website (see attached). In addition, HSAG purchases copies of the "Healthy Directions" annual calendar. This calendar (see attached) contains monthly tips to a happier, healthier, safer, you. Copies of the monthly calendar are hung in public places from which all can read and learn.

Employee Leadership

One person can make a difference...One of HSAG's staff experienced a near death artery blockage. For someone in their 60s or 70s, this seems more commonplace today. However, for someone age 34, this is not the norm. Adult white male, age 34, over 40 pounds overweight, bad genes, diet of big gulp and sugar; recipe for disaster.

Today he has a few stents, is 50 pounds lighter, eats a diet of lean protein and vegetables, does not eat processed food or "junk food" and hasn't seen a carbonated drink in over two years. Exercise has become his way of life and has even been seen riding his bike to work on occasion. He is the poster child for getting healthy and others follow in his footsteps daily.

Gather around the lunch tables at HSAG and you will hear discussions of probiotics and naturopathic healing. People share recipes that include all natural ingredients and other "whole foods." Young staff and older staff share health food tips such as eating Greek yogurt instead of regular yogurt. There is a lot higher protein content, less sugar content and you will feel full longer. Trader Joes has a natural low-glycemic sweetener called Agave, ever try it? How about butter made from olive oil—half the calories. HSAG staff is lucky to have a colleague who is extremely knowledgeable regarding food and naturopathic remedies for everything from indigestion to a bad cough. She holds ad-hoc mini-sessions with staff and provides wonderful tips.

We are all looking forward to having our next learning session with BCBS to learn "What Not to Eat; Labels Can Be Deceiving." The HSAG ED HR specifically asked to have this information presented to staff. Knowledge is power. We need to hear it from a registered dietician, not the retailers who publicize commercials stating that high fructose corn syrup is made from real corn and thus good for you.

Supportive Culture

What type of pizza are we having? Don't forget the chocolate chip cookies for dessert because they are the best. This was the conversation that our Facilities and Conference Planning staff often heard. HSAG's Wellness Campaign has begun to change this. For the last two company gatherings, HSAG has provided all staff with whole wheat turkey or vegetable sub sandwiches and grapes. Yes, grapes. Soda... no more.

Many staff spend their lunch and break walking instead of eating or smoking. HSAG has a smoke-free policy and campus. There is one designated smoking area, which very few can be found using. Guilt? Maybe.

HSAG staff have been given the opportunity to sign up with a health coach if their physical condition warrants it or if they just desire a little extra assistance getting healthy. Those who have been involved with the coaches have reported that the time spent was very effective. The tips learned are passed from one staff person to another.

As an extra little incentive, HSAG recently negotiated to pay LA Fitness a flat rate initiation fee which enables as many HSAG employees as desired to join the gym by paying only a monthly fee. HSAG's efforts have enticed 36 staff and their families, if desired, to join a gym and get moving.

What's next? Vending machines. Anyone for dried fruits and walnuts, yes, they are the healthiest nut.

Awareness and Lifestyles

It's a way of life, not a diet. Diet is a four letter word. What HSAG is trying to do is make people aware and change their lifestyle. We started before our official "Wellness Campaign" by having a Weight Watchers At Work Program and a Friday Yoga Program.

We are continuing our Wellness Campaign by encouraging people to get moving. "10,000 Step" competitions and gym membership are steps in the right direction. Healthy eating and education round out the implementation plan.

HSAG's intranet is the source for all employee information. We currently host health and wellness newsletters on this site and plan, during 2009, to add all BCBS presentation materials from our quarterly meetings. In addition, we will be adding links to other websites which encompass health and wellness materials.

Each year HSAG provides on-site flu and pneumonia vaccinations for its staff. This will continue as it makes it easier for busy people to obtain the care they need or desire.

In this day of increased health care costs with no end in sight, we all know that we need to take action and staff have been doing just that. Many have already asked when our next My BluePrint Biometric screening will be. Those "oatmeal eaters" want to see if their cholesterol really was affected. Until then, we will continue to help each other with getting healthy in 2009.