



# Employee Wellness in the Hospital Setting: Best Practices for Today and Tomorrow

INSIGHTS FROM INTERACTIVE HEALTH, A LEADER IN THE HEALTH PROMOTION INDUSTRY FOR OVER 25 YEARS

Health care organizations face unique employee health challenges. On the one hand, many employees are already tuned in to the importance of healthy behaviors in preventing and managing major diseases. On the other hand, health care jobs are highly stressful. More than half of U.S. physicians and similar numbers of nurses suffer from burnout. “We are learning that this leads to worse physical health, lower quality of life and decreased job satisfaction for employees and that leads to a loss of top performers for employers,” says Kate Wolin, ScD, chief science officer, Interactive Health.

A 2011 Thomson Reuters study found that hospital workers are more likely to have various chronic conditions, such as diabetes or depression, than the U.S. workforce in general. Health care costs for hospital employees are 10 percent higher than the general population.

As health care organizations work to achieve the Institute for Healthcare Improvement’s Triple Aim — improving the

patient experience, lowering total costs and enhancing population health — leaders are recognizing that they need to prioritize employee health. When health care workers are struggling with physical or behavioral health problems, they cannot provide the level of care and service that patients expect and deserve.

## GOOD TO GREAT

Interactive Health partners with hospitals across the country who are committed to incorporating health promotion into their strategy to improve the health of their employees. A common core objective for these hospitals: ensuring they have a great wellness program; one that improves health and drives measurable gains in the organization’s financial performance.

Interactive Health, with more than a quarter century of experience and employee health data, is uniquely positioned to help hospitals achieve this objective. In a recent analysis, Interactive Health reviewed data from its

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combined active hospital and health care client base with almost 60,000 wellness program participants and compared this data to four of its high-performing hospital clients of various sizes whose results show healthier employees and cost savings. The goal: To better understand what factors are driving the high-performer's success.

### Insights:

The Interactive Health high-performing workforce wellness programs are making a difference in the lives of their employees and reducing health care costs.

- Seven health risks, including inactivity, emotional distress, sleep apnea, metabolic syndrome, cholesterol, diabetes and hypertension, were less prevalent among employees at the four high-performing hospitals when compared to the combined active Interactive Health hospital client participants.
- Employees at high-performing hospitals with moderate or high health risks were more likely to lower their risk.
- Interactive Health's high-performing hospital clients are saving, on average, \$3.33 in health care costs for every \$1 spent on wellness.

### PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LEVEL

Interactive Health continues to provide its clients with new insights and innovative services to improve employee health and reduce health care costs. At an April 2018 client conference, Interactive Health executives described how the company's wellness offerings continue to evolve to deliver more personalized solutions to employees.

**Expanding the definition of wellness.** The interaction between emotional and physical health conditions can either enhance or impede total health outcomes. Employers benefit significantly by taking an interest in understanding and positively impacting both an employee's physical and emotional health. A recent Interactive Health study across 750,000 employees analyzed the interaction between emotional and physical health conditions. At a high level, the data showed increased physical health risks for employees with emotional health risks. Additionally, members who decreased their emotional health risk also significantly

reduced their physical health risks. So not only are the risk levels correlated, but the study found that simply engaging members with emotional health risks is correlated with physical health risk reduction.

As a direct call to action based on these findings, Interactive Health departed on an 18-month pilot seeking to address the connections between mind and body, with enhanced emotional health resources included with its signature solution. Fifty-five percent of employees in the program who were provided holistic (physical and emotional) targeted interventions reduced their overall health risk. Employees with hypertension and pre-diabetes saw a significantly higher rate of improvement compared to other employees with the disease who did not have access to the enhanced emotional health resources. These promising pilot results led to the recent launch of enhanced emotional health resources to all clients.

In addition to improving health, the program is leading to real savings. "Our data science team found that when someone's suffering from moderate to severe emotional

## What do these high-performing hospitals have in common?

### High-performers Commonalities

- Management support and buy-in.
- Meaningful wellness goals to drive healthy outcomes, make positive sustainable changes in personal well-being and manage health care costs.
- A focus on employee accountability in achieving measurable results.
- A partnership of more than three years with Interactive Health.
- Integration of hospital resources into the wellness program.
- A significant financial incentive of \$600 or more tied to the benefit plan.
- High employee participation over time.
- High engagement — between 93 percent and 98 percent — are active users of their wellness website.

distress, it's costing you (employers) an additional \$2,500 to \$5,000 on top of your medical spend," says Interactive Health's Jane Ruppert, RDN, LDN, CDE, senior vice president clinical service delivery.

**Guiding behavior change.** "None of my behavioral science colleagues were shocked when headlines announced that handing everyone a Fitbit doesn't work," says Wolin. While she is a proponent of activity trackers for those who like them, Wolin stresses that it takes more than a gadget to engage an employee population over the long term.

To achieve significant and lasting improvements in employee health, wellness programs need to be guided by scientifically backed principles of behavior change. Wolin outlined eight principles that Interactive Health has adopted:

- **Call to action:** Does the program inspire employees to achieve health goals that they are currently most interested in addressing? An employee may need to lose weight but first wants to reduce stress.
- **Load reduction:** Will the employee find the program easy to use? If it is time-consuming or difficult to use, employees will be less likely to participate.
- **Therapeutic rationale:** Is it clear how logging calories or completing other steps will lead to the employee's desired health goal?
- **Rewards:** Does the program recognize achievements and provide appropriate recognition?
- **Data-driven/adaptive content:** Does the program offer employees personalized content that reflects their current reality (e.g., preferences, interests and environment)?
- **Science-backed programming:** Does the programming have demonstrated results or follow science-backed approaches to behavior change — from weight loss



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—Jane Ruppert, RDN, LDN, CDE, Senior Vice President  
Clinical Service Delivery, Interactive Health

and medication adherence to financial health and building emotional resiliency?

- **Ongoing feedback:** Does the program provide invitations to connect throughout the year and continue to respond to changes employees make?
- **Expectations/relevance:** Is the program relevant to the employee and are expectations in line with the employee's situation? For example, a marathon training program would not be relevant to someone who dislikes running.

**Using data analytics to personalize the employee experience.** Currently, employee wellness programs gather a variety of data about an employee's health (e.g., cholesterol levels, smoking habits). But this only reveals what health risks employees have, not how to best help these individuals lower their risks. "As an industry, we have done a poor job of understanding consumer preferences and motivations," says Interactive Health's Brad Lawson, chief commercial officer. "We've assumed

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that we can fit everybody with a certain risk factor into the same program.”

Interactive Health continues to improve wellness programming and services so they will be more personalized. In addition to considering an employee’s biometric test results and health risk assessment data, sophisticated algorithms will be able to pinpoint personalized wellness solutions and approaches based on other relevant types of data, including:

- **Preferences:** One employee may favor swimming over running and prefer to receive health reminders via text versus email.
- **Motivation:** Some employees are motivated by a competitive challenge (e.g., training for a 5K race) while others may be more inspired to get active if it means helping their kids get active, too.
- **Goals:** One person may want to lose weight for an upcoming event, while a co-worker hopes to reduce the aches and pains of arthritis.
- **Social determinants of health:** Individuals on tight budgets need low-cost advice on eating healthy.
- **Worksite and geographic opportunities:** Employees might receive healthy lunch suggestions pulled from their organization’s cafeteria menu.
- **Claims and electronic health record data:** Employees who are overdue for refilling their asthma medication could receive a reminder.

## WORKING TOWARD GREATER RETURNS

High-performing workforce wellness programs are making a difference in employees’ lives and lowering employers’ health care costs. Even greater returns are possible with a more personalized approach. As more is learned about how to engage employee populations in wellness programs and get them to adopt healthy behaviors and achieve personal goals, it is clear that one size does not fit every employee. By learning more about what matters to each employee, it will be possible to develop tools, solutions and programs that appeal to them and inspire them to take action.



“Happy and engaged employees translate to high patient satisfaction.”

–Marion “Tony” Thompson, CEO, FACHE,  
Chief Executive Officer, Allen County Regional Hospital

<sup>1</sup> Dyrbye, L.N., Shanafelt, T.D., Sinsky, C.A., et al., *Burnout Among Health Care Professionals: A Call to Explore and Address This Underrecognized Threat to Safe, High-Quality Care*, National Academy of Medicine, July 5, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Thomson Reuters, Sicker and Costlier: *Healthcare Utilization of U.S. Hospital Employees*, August 2011.



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