

Health and productivity: Delivering the workforce of the future

ABSTRACT

Health and productivity initiatives continue to be updated and refined in countries around the world. Employers worldwide are looking for opportunities to keep their employees healthy and productive. A recent summit hosted by the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine and the Integrated Benefits Institute found that not enough employers are familiar with the fundamental linkage between health and productivity, nor are they utilising the many resources and tools already available to help build a healthier workforce. A more consistent system of workforce health measurement is needed and employees must be engaged in a system-wide effort to improve their health for their personal benefit, for the benefit of the businesses they serve, and for the benefit of the wider economy of which they are a part. In the United States, a workforce health policy must be a fundamental part of health care reform. In Europe, recent reviews such as the UK's "working for a healthier tomorrow," have reaffirmed the human, social and economic costs of impaired health and well-being in relation to working life in Britain and the critical importance of improving the health of the working age population to secure higher economic growth and to increase social justice. As we look towards a global economy, health is an essential prerequisite for productivity and economic development and must be a key cornerstone to employers of every nation.

The presentation at ICOH focuses on how to move workplace health and productivity toward a model of wellness and prevention, rather than a reactive treatment of illness; the role of evidence based medicine in health and productivity and effective programmes for the workplace of the future. The future of occupational medicine must focus on innovative health programmes that take into account workplace safety and health, as well as personal health enhancement. Engaging employees in taking care of their own health will provide opportunities for competitive advantage for global corporations. A more consistent system of workforce health measurement linked to expressions of productivity is needed and each nation's employees must be engaged with employers as partners in a system-wide effort to improve health. As health and productivity programmes expand globally, the challenge for employers is to identify and implement programmes that are evidence-based, locally relevant and culturally sensitive. Technology and globally focused professional partnerships may help with deployment of customised programmes internationally.

Key words: health, productivity, economic growth, health-care reform, programmes and tools

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