

HEALTH & PREVENTION: INTEGRATING ADVOCACY INTO AN ABSENCE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM.



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We would never ask someone to recover from surgery for torn ligaments, a broken leg or other physical disability without the support and structure of a rehab program. That's part of the disability healing process to prepare workers to return to work and make a full recovery. So, why wouldn't we use advocacy tools and resources to help keep our employees at work and provide the needed support and guidance when they are suffering from nonphysical challenges?

Employers are constantly challenged to maintain and increase workforce productivity.

Many tools are available to assist an injured worker while on disability or leave. In addition, many employers have adopted wellness and prevention programs focused on employee health. Programs such as smoking cessation, weight loss, and disease management interventions have had significant impacts for some employers while utilization still remains very low.¹

Absence management is intended to control an employer's lost productivity from a holistic perspective and should be answering the questions: *How many employees are missing from work?* and *How do we get them back and keep them at work?*

Advocacy programs can have a significant impact helping to increase productivity, but these events and opportunities need to be identified early in the process. At times, our first notice of an issue from an employee is an event, disability or leave, that takes him or her out of work for a significant period of time. Often this is the first sign of a problem; but, it's not too late to help. Programs such as EAP and disease management can have longer term impacts on an employee's health and lifestyle. Although a disabling event triggers the intervention, all is not lost.

These programs are very beneficial in controlling future absences and get the employee on track for future improved health and productivity.

Early signs based on utilization of intermittent leaves are also an indication that support is needed. Employees who had a continuous or intermittent leave in one year have an increased likelihood of an STD claim in the next year.² Employees who are high utilizers of intermittent leave need access to support services that an advocacy-type program can provide. Other than the traditional EAP-type programs that focus on an individual's disabling condition, many intermittent leaves are for care of a family member.

Employees also could significantly benefit from elder care services, legal and financial assistance or adoption support in addition to medically based support mechanisms. All of these advocacy-type programs are designed to create a healthier environment and mindset for employees so they can focus on productivity at work versus worrying and missing time related to the care of others. Having these types of advocacy programs in place will benefit any absence program.

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¹ RAND Employer Survey, 2012.

² IBI, "Early Warnings: Using FMLA to Understand and Manage Disability Absence," February 2013.



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