



Fit for Work

Introducing a corporate wellness programme isn't just about detecting health problems – it tells your staff you care about them.

– By Dr Eleanor Au

Work affects health and health affects work

Corporate health assessments are becoming increasingly common in the workplace. With issues like obesity and high blood pressure becoming more prevalent, there is a shift in focus towards preventive medicine. Health checks aim to promote and maintain well-being through early detection and management of risk factors that could lead to serious diseases. A company's workforce is its most valuable asset so it is sensible to invest in your staff to assist them to stay healthy, which in turn helps to increase productivity and improve performance.

There is always a place for corporate health checks in every company, no matter what the size or industry is. The assessment should be tailored to the demographics of the workforce. The outcome of these health checks rarely detects serious disease as

one would expect for a generally 'healthy' workforce but about two-thirds will be given recommendation that guides them to improve significantly their long-term health and wellness. Take Matilda International Hospital for example, in one of our corporate screening programmes, the percentage of urgent abnormal outcome was <1% in a cohort of just over 1,000 employees. What's important is that 94% of employees received wellness or intervention/follow-up advice, reflecting the benefit of annual advice as a reminder of better lifestyle and health surveillance.

A successful corporate wellness programme (CWP) should aim to improve employee health and increase job performance. Whilst wellness is correlated with a reduction in sickness absences, the ability to perform with a sound body and mind is more important. Therefore, companies should find ways to motivate employees to manage their

ongoing health and performance. In addition, CWPs subtly communicate to the staff that the company cares about them and reduces staff turnover rates. This in turn helps to save money and resources in recruiting and training new staff, whilst retaining the wealth of knowledge high achieving staff have. The company may also benefit from savings on insurance plans.

Results of CWPs can provide the organisation with health trends across the workforce, such as average levels of health and fitness compared to population averages, so that the company can review its working practices and use the information to enhance the work environment.

A holistic approach

The World Health Organisation identifies eight key risk factors to health, all of which could be addressed in a health check: smoking, drinking alcohol, obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, high blood glucose (risk of diabetes), poor diet and lack of exercise. Lifestyle advice and support should be offered when any of these risks are detected, which all help to reap long-term health benefits. A company that fosters a healthy work-life balance in its employees is able to maximise individual health, energy and performance. Furthermore, it is an excellent opportunity to engage employees in health education and discuss any health concerns.

Screening should be holistic, which means taking into account the full understanding of the individual patient: social aspects such as work (stress, occupational hazards), travel, lifestyle (smoking, alcohol use, exercise), family history, past medical history, and use of medication etc. It usually comprises basic screening tests suited to the patient's age and gender, for example, routine blood tests, pap smear for cervical cancer

screening, and mammogram if age over 40 for breast cancer screening. The whole picture is crucial in determining overall health with the test results.

Testing, testing... more is certainly not better

Screening should be individualised which means earlier testing or more specific tests should be offered to those with personal risks. For example, chest X-rays for smokers, exercise ECG for those at risk of cardiovascular disease, and earlier testing for breast or colon cancer with mammogram or colonoscopy for high-risk patients.

It is important to have a pre-screening discussion with the doctor so that you can make an informed decision. The more screening tests on offer, the greater the cumulative likelihood of a false positive result (i.e. a positive test result in the absence of disease) requiring more needless investigation and causing unnecessary stress. So, far from being a benefit, in a minority of cases it can actually lead to harm. Take for example, cancer marker screenings. They are rarely helpful in detecting cancer early, but when done with a 'holistic' check-up combined with other tests in those at higher risk, they may be helpful in early detection of cancer. Discussion with the doctor enables a better understanding of your lifestyle, family history and risk factors, so as to decide what tests are appropriate for assessing your health.

Make healthy choice the easier choice

Companies prepared to make investments in employee health and well-being help to foster employee engagement and loyalty, which in turn increases productivity in the workplace and creates healthier and happier individuals. A healthy workforce provides a competitive advantage in the marketplace. 



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Matilda International Hospital is a not for profit private hospital that has been operating in Hong Kong for 110 years, providing personalised patient care with international standards. Key areas of expertise include health screening, women's health and maternity, orthopaedics and spine, ear nose and throat, and general surgery.



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