

The Healthcare Savings Chronicle

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Alternative Healthcare Solutions

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The Advantages of High Touch vs High Tech Self-Care and Wellness Information

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by Don R. Powell, Ph.D.

President

American Institute for Preventive Medicine

Organizations have been successful at reducing healthcare costs by helping their employees/members become wiser health care consumers and live a healthier lifestyle. One effective way to accomplish this is by providing a self-care and wellness guide. It teaches consumers to make better decisions about what medical symptoms require professional assistance and those that can be treated at home using self-care. This is in light of the fact that approximately 25% of all doctor visits and 55% of all emergency room visits are deemed to be unnecessary.

A number of organizations, particularly those that provide Consumer Driven Health Care (CDH), are putting self-care and wellness information solely online as a way to reduce costs. They rationalize that "everybody" uses the internet and it is a low cost way to reach employees/members. Unfortunately, this view has many flaws. Not only will the organization reach less than a quarter of its people, but it will not save any money.

Organizations should provide a self-care and wellness guide in print to each employee/member and only use online content as an adjunct to it. This is the best way for a company to reach the majority of its employees/members and to reduce healthcare costs. The facts below reinforce this.

1. There have been scores of studies on printed self-care and wellness guides that have



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documented lower healthcare costs due to reductions in physician and E.R. visits. The average Return on Investment is 3:1. There are no studies that have shown any financial benefit from providing online self-care and wellness information. (See references that follow.)

2. Only about 50% of the U.S. population has internet access and only about half of them go online for health information. You will only reach about 25% of your employees/members with online self-care and wellness content.

Source: Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), May 14, 2003

3. According to a research study involving over 60,000 people, consumers were found to be more interested in receiving health information from their doctor, books, or friends/relatives before using the internet. Only 16% of those surveyed said the internet is where they like to receive health information.

Source: Center for Studying Health System Change, Issue Brief No. 61, March, 2003

4. The information in a self-care and wellness guide is concise and easily accessible. In an emergency, you don't want to spend time booting up your computer and going online. Also, some people have trouble using their computers or have slow dial-up service and find the process to be very time consuming.

A self-care and wellness book allows information to be accessed from any room in the home, not just the computer room. In addition, when using a self-care book, employees/members don't have to compete with other family members for internet access.

5. If an employee only has internet or intranet access at their worksite, they won't be able to access self-care and wellness information at home where they need it the most. Also, they will be using company time to surf the web for health information. A printed self-care and wellness guide gives them the opportunity to receive self-care instructions at home on their own time.

Even if your employees have access to the internet at home and are knowledgeable about how to find information, they may not be the home's "caregiver." Also, the family's "caregiver" may not be internet savvy.

6. Putting your organization's name and logo on a self-care and wellness guide indicates your

sponsorship of the publication. Studies have shown that over 90% of employees think receiving a self-care guide is a valuable employee benefit. Providing online health information may not create the same positive feelings towards the organization.

7. On the web, there are usually many articles on a particular subject. Consumers need to do a good deal of searching to find the article that is most relevant for them. Users of a self-care publication do not have to scroll through scores of articles to find what they need.

8. By providing all employees/members with the same self-care and wellness guide, you know they are getting consistent recommendations about what to do for various symptoms. Consumers going to different websites may get conflicting or inaccurate information.

9. When consumers do go online for health information, they are more likely to do so for a specific disease, like asthma or diabetes, rather than for an everyday health problem, like a sore throat or cold.

Source: Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2003

10. Most people still prefer the convenience of opening up a self-care and wellness publication and sitting down to read it. If books were no longer an important source of health information, Barnes and Noble, Borders, and Amazon would not be as popular as they are.

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For more information, please contact Don Powell at 248.539.1800, ext 221 or via email at dpowell@healthylife.com.

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