

Best Practices

INNOVATIVE HEALTHCARE SOLUTIONS: AURORA HEALTH CARE



Location: Eastern Wisconsin, Northern Illinois

Industry: Healthcare provider

Size: Nearly 29,000 employees in hospitals, clinics, pharmacies and other facilities in eastern Wisconsin and northern Illinois.

Contacts: John Koshuta, Wellness Coordinator
Missy Reischl, Manager Total Health

BACKGROUND

Aurora Health Care, a not-for-profit Wisconsin integrated health care provider, was created around a single idea: There is a better way to provide health care. The 29,000 people of Aurora are working together to give people better access, better service and better results than they can find anywhere else.

Established in 1984, Aurora has become a nationally recognized leader in efforts to improve the quality of health care. Aurora has sites in more than 90 communities throughout eastern Wisconsin, including 13 hospitals, more than 100 clinics and over 130 community pharmacies. More than 3,400 physicians are

affiliated with Aurora Health Care, including over 700 who make up Aurora Medical Group.

Aurora, in partnership with the University of Wisconsin Medical School, operates community clinics in the Milwaukee area, most of them in under-served neighborhoods. The clinics emphasize prevention and wellness while providing a wide range of primary care. Aurora's community outreach efforts also include an extensive parish nursing program that serves more than 35 congregations.

CURRENT GOALS

Aurora Health Care is committed to helping individual employees identify their risk factors, educating them on behavior changes and guiding them in the development of a personalized wellness plan.

Their goal for 2009 is to maintain the momentum of their wellness programs keeping wellness in the forefront of all employees.

BENEFIT PLANS

Aurora offers a variety of health care plan options for their employees. Several deductible options are available for in-network and out-of-network plans. Deductibles are waived on all preventive care services.

HEALTH RISK ASSESSMENT (HRA)

In 2007, Aurora started a Health Risk Assessment program for employees. This program has become the core of their wellness efforts. Incentives are provided to take the test and to pass or improve results in three key areas; blood pressure, cholesterol and body mass index. They currently have about 50 percent participation in this program.

WELLNESS PROGRAMS

Wellness programs are developed by 18 local wellness committees around the state. The local committees arrange nutritional programs, fitness programs and community runs/walks. They also share best practices between sites. Aurora has established a corporate wellness committee that monitors the local wellness activities and

is in the process of developing a tool kit of best practices to share with all facilities. This committee comprises representatives from human resources, EAP (Employee Assistance Program), complementary medicine, care management, wellness coordination, employee health, nutritional services, and internal communications.

Currently Aurora is focusing on programs that can be developed and offered very efficiently at the local-site level.

Programs planned for 2009 include an educational series being developed by the corporate wellness committee called "Innovative Ideas to Inspire." This program will be web-based with weekly articles, links, games, etc. Examples of article titles include "Are You an Optimist or Pessimist?" and "Overcoming Worry."

The corporate committee is also developing a Wellness Management Toolkit. This kit will provide managers with tools to integrate wellness into all levels of management. For instance, managers will be given materials to encourage employees to participate in HRAs and other wellness activities, provide healthy snack choices for internal meetings and encourage physical activities like climbing stairs and walking on breaks.

Some wellness programs are site specific. For instance, at Aurora Sinai Medical Center stair wells were repainted in pleasing colors to encourage employees to climb the stairs instead of taking the elevator. Wellness fairs are also held at many sites.

In a very unique program, six Aurora sites sponsor a weekly Farmer's Market in the facility parking lots. They have partnered with local groups like Growing Power¹ to make these arrangements very popular.

Some Aurora sites include wellness centers designed primarily for patient rehab and similar services. When space is available, employees are allowed access for personal use.

SMOKING CESSATION

Aurora offers incentives to encourage employees to stop using tobacco products. All Aurora properties are designated as smoke free. An incentive of up to \$500 per year is offered to employees and other covered family members to cover the cost of smoking cessation products, aids and education. They offer the Freedom from Smoking program from the American Lung Association².

LIGHTEN UP WISCONSIN

Aurora participated during this past year in the web based Lighten Up Wisconsin program offered through the Wisconsin Sports Development Authority³. Employees were reimbursed for registering in the

program. Nutritional experts and fitness information is provided to employees who participate in groups of two to 10 in a series of weight loss challenges. About 725 employees participated in the past year.

TEACH THE TEACHER

Aurora Health Care has established a comprehensive program to teach others to be wellness teachers. This program is designed to address the critical "missteps" in personal health care that have occurred in the last 150 years of industrializing society, with specific strategies on how to reverse them. It will allow effective health care strategies to be pushed into the workplace with a partnership of communication and collaboration across the clinical divide into traditional "sickness care." The goal is to catch key lifestyle risks early and effect changes before damage begins. With a considerable amount of health care costs being attributable to lifestyle choices, managing risk and cost in the work place is the future of health care. The teachers are imbedded in the work place as colleagues and friends.

OTHER SERVICES

Aurora's website-based "Perk Spot" provides employees with discounts for online purchases of a variety of goods and services. Health club discounts, fitness equipment discounts and discounts on wellness products are a few of the programs offered.

Aurora offers comprehensive EAP services to employees using internal and external resources. These include assessments and referrals, management training and consulting, crises intervention, behavioral health management and work/life services.

Complementary medicine services are offered. Acupuncture, Massage and Chiropractic care are integrated into Aurora Health Care clinics and hospital services. Lifestyle management and exercise programs available include yoga, Tai Chi, aromatherapy and meditation.

Aurora Rehabilitation Services provides ergonomic assessments and education to different units for body mechanics and injury prevention and free injury evaluations. In 2009, Rehabilitation Services, along with other departments, produced a video available on Aurora's intranet with step-by-step instructions for a five minute stretching routine.

COMMUNICATIONS AND OTHER INFORMATION

"My Aurora" is a website created by Aurora Health Care that allows users quick and easy access to helpful health and wellness information. Resources include a

direct link to a participant's doctor and Aurora facilities near the participant's home. Participants can also find links to reliable, in-depth health information relevant to their personal situation based on health history, health goals and health interests. My Aurora also has many interactive tools such as prescription history, body mass index calculation and Calorie Burner and it acts as an online personal health record. Employees can also access pending hospital and clinic bills, check on status and set up payment plans.

AURORA PHARMACY

Aurora Pharmacy operates more than 130 pharmacies in eastern Wisconsin. Aurora pharmacies include freestanding community drug stores as well as pharmacies within clinics, hospitals and grocery stores. Incentives are provided when employees purchase medications and other products through Aurora Pharmacy's network of stores across the state. Many are conveniently located at Aurora hospital and clinic sites.

METRICS

Aurora closely monitors HRA survey results and trends. They actively seek employee feedback on the efficacy of wellness initiatives and track participation trends in wellness programs.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH: TOTAL HEALTH

Community Outreach includes professional education and training, chair massage and lifestyle programs and services available to local business. Electronic access to free educational podcasts and meditation activities are available via www.aurorahealthcare.org.

Aurora's Total Health Program provides a cost effective way for community employers to stimulate interest in health and wellness among their employees. Total Health fine tunes Aurora's experience with its own employees to reach out and offer similar services in the communities they serve.

Their goal is to support corporations in controlling rising health care costs by improving employee health and increasing educated use of the health care system. They believe that worksite wellness programming stands out as the long-term answer for reducing medical costs, improving productivity, lowering absenteeism, and reducing Worker's Compensation claims. Based on recent surveys, they strongly recommend that health risk appraisals become the core component of a company's wellness programming.

Aurora conducts HRAs and health risk screenings for employers utilizing the HRA tool developed by University of Michigan HMRC⁴. They provide individual employees with relevant data about their current health status, educational information and recommendations for how to reduce risk factors. For employers, they provide statistical summary of results which will help guide the development of future plans for wellness activities specific to that employer group. Coaching is provided to employees based on test results and risk factors.

The HRA package includes the finger stick method of testing for cholesterol, glucose and triglycerides, blood pressure, and body mass index screenings and worksite educational programs.

Aurora offers a wide array of occupational health services like injury treatment and management, physical exams, preplacement testing, substance abuse programs, and medical surveillance/screening programs. They also provide onsite flu shots and immunizations. Total Health and Occupational Health staff work together to coordinate these services for specific corporate clients. They have found that many employers look to Aurora for guidance on how to deliver these services and Aurora has responded with these outreach programs.

Some additional services include one-on-one nutritional consultations, disease management health and nutrition health talks, and exercise classes.

Aurora also provides consultative services to help employers with dietary recommendations, health coaching, HRA follow-ups, wellness needs assessments, and a wellness program strategic plan.

AWARDS

Aurora recently received the coveted "Gold Workplace Award" from Welcoa⁵ for their innovative wellness programs.

REFERENCES

¹Growing Power: <http://www.growingpower.org/>

²American Lung Association Freedom From Smoking www.ffsonline.org

³Wisconsin Sports Development Corporation: <http://www.lightenupwisconsin.com/>

⁴University of Michigan Health Management Research Center: <http://www.hmrc.umich.edu/>

⁵Welcoa: <http://www.wellnesscouncilwi.org/home.html>

For more information contact Mike Shoys at WMC: 608-258-3400 or mshoys@wmc.org

View other Wisconsin Business Best Practices Reports at <http://www.wmc.org/healthcare/index.php>

Best Practices

WMC's healthcare agenda includes initiatives to encourage employers to take innovative steps to improve the health status of their employees and control their healthcare costs. WMC has identified employers whose healthcare initiatives can serve as best practices for others to use as models for their own initiatives.

Healthcare Best Practices—Common Lessons Learned

WMC has interviewed a number of companies who have taken bold steps to control their healthcare costs and improve the health status of their employees. From those best practices, we have seen a series of common elements or lessons learned. A summary follows:

- *Employees must be engaged in programs to improve their health. Incentives are essential to engaging employees.*
- *Innovative practices come from companies with executives who push the boundaries and drive their employees to seek change.*
- *While cash or tangible incentives sweeten the pot, reduction (or increase!) of the employee's share of health insurance premiums is the most effective strategy.*
- *A broad array of wellness options engages more employees. Flexibility of access during and off of normal working hours increases participation.*
- *Successful programs emphasize improved productivity and cost savings, and often focus on mental, as well as physical, well-being.*
- *Most employers recognize that "doing the right thing" for their employees' health is incentive enough to invest in wellness programs. For those with this philosophy, positive returns on investment follow.*
- *Health Risk Assessments provide the basis for most programs because they immediately engage employees. It is equally important to engage spouses, and to the degree possible, dependents enrolled in family plans, in health assessments and wellness activities.*
- *Consumer-driven plan designs experience slow employee acceptance unless significant incentives or disincentives are provided. Employers must educate and aggressively market the benefits of these plans to employees in order to get participation.*
- *As programs evolve, employers realize the need to dedicate an individual to develop, market, and monitor wellness programs. As programs mature, they need to be integrated, such as the coordination of exercise programs, medication regimens and nutritional guidelines for high-risk employees.*
- *Goals and objectives with appropriate metrics must be clearly stated and communicated to employees. They have to understand why it is important to them and to the company.*
- *Management of chronic/high risk diseases provides the best opportunity for cost savings. The 80/20 rule applies; 80 percent of healthcare costs are spent on 20 percent of the healthcare encounters.*
- *Almost any size company can implement programs to improve wellness and cut costs. The range of options is scalable to company size. Help is out there from companies who have already implemented best practices.*
- *And finally, leading companies are more than willing to share their health care best practices with other companies in their communities.*