

Employee wellness push showing results, Excelsa Health says

BY KRIS B. MAMULA

Excelsa Health's four-year-old employee wellness push has begun paying off in improved productivity and lower-than-expected health insurance premiums, achievements small business owners are noticing.

Workforce fitness and preventive medical care has been the hot ticket in controlling spiraling health care costs, and a new internal report found Excelsa's employees are 94 percent productive on the job, which compares to an industry average of 92 percent. In a metric reflecting overall health of the hospital network's workforce, Excelsa ranked 81.21, besting the industry average of 78.84, according to the report.

What's more, the average lifestyle score has been rising at Excelsa, from 79.8 in 2010 to 81.48 last year.

The results were self-reported by 3,234 employees, but the impact on health insurance premiums reflects the findings: Excelsa had a 3.4 percent increase in health care costs in 2011, which compares to a 27 percent increase when Excelsa kicked off its wellness initiatives in 2007, according to John Caverno, senior vice president of human resources.

"We've been at this in earnest since 2007, but 2008 was when we actually turned it around," Caverno said. "It's a business imperative and also the right thing to do to take care of your employees."

Last year, Excelsa began taking its wellness message to the business community with a simple message: You, too, can bend the health care cost curve, reduce insurance premiums and boost productivity. The community can realize the health benefits of such programs, but the hospital network also benefits by gaining new patients when medical follow up is needed.

For decades, the cost of medical care has easily outpaced the inflation rate, with the exception of the past few years, when the medical inflation rate slowed significantly. Still, employers such as senior living provider Redstone Highlands of Greensburg are seeking a partnership with Excelsa to tame health insurance premiums by making workers healthier, said Jim Hodge, vice president of human resources.

Through its programs, Excelsa is shifting the focus to wellness from the hospital's traditional role of disease management, diagnosing problems earlier when

treatment costs can be less. Hodge said he was interested in making the Visual Eating and Exercise Program available to Redstone's 450 employees and families.

The program costs \$99, which Redstone is considering offering employees through payroll deductions. Reimbursement for the program would be based on the amount of weight the employee lost, he said.

VEEP is an online weight control and fitness program that was developed by Marina Del Rey, Calif.-based Lookcut Inc.

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Washington care home closing one of its facilities

A Washington County personal care home operator has opted to close one nine-bed facility by April while appealing the state Department of Public Welfare's decision not to renew licenses for three other nearby homes where a total of 34 people live, all of whom are mentally ill or have intellectual disabilities.

■ **PENN HILLS CARE HOME APPEALS 2ND DOWNGRADE,** pittsburghbusiness.com

Cymbeline Dumandan, owner of the four Rest Haven Personal Care homes on Valley Road in Canonsburg, withdrew a licensing appeal Feb. 9 and informed DPW the facility will close, according to DPW spokeswoman Anne Bale. Nine people live at the facility. DPW notified Dumandan that licenses for Rest Haven buildings 2, 3, and 4, where another 25 people live, would not be renewed.

Appeal hearings have not yet been scheduled, Bale said. Efforts to reach Dumandan were unsuccessful.

Admissions were banned at building 2, and Dumandan was notified the facility's license would not be renewed in December for violations ranging from inadequate supervision of residents to improperly stored and expired food, according to licensing records. The home also was cited for not paying three residents for work performed within the home.

Violations at building 4 included a delay in reporting allegations of sexual harassment involving a staff member and resident, a repeat violation from April and October 2011, according to DPW records.

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