The Challenge

Every company experiences absenteeism in some form or fashion, and while many wellness programs are designed to promote total well-being of employees, the existence of high levels of absenteeism are still too prevalent. Adherence to maintenance medications for chronic conditions and diseases is at the top of the list.

The Study

In a 2016 study published by Pansalus Consulting addressing absenteeism, Gallup states that, “over 70 percent of employees are actively disengaged,” meaning employees are checked out mentally during work hours. Poor medication management is a significant source of the phenomenon. By taking steps to resolve drug therapy problems, benefits team leaders can drive down absenteeism and presenteeism. There is a link between non-adherence and productivity according to a study published in the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (JOEM), “Impact of Medication Adherence on Absenteeism and Short-Term Disability for Five Chronic Diseases.” Programs specifically tailored to identify, intervene, and show impact by closing drug therapy problems can mitigate plan exposure and declining productivity. Deploying such program is part of the solution.

The Study

To calculate the impact of medication adherence on absenteeism and short-term...
The Study (cont.)

disability among employees with chronic diseases, the JOEM study analyzed administrative health care claims, absenteeism and short-term disability data in over 16 medium to large-sized employer groups and 100,000 employees. Absenteeism data was calculated using the employer’s payroll system and included all paid time off. The study focused on five chronic diseases including diabetes, hypertension, congestive heart failure, dyslipidemia, and asthma/ chronic obstructive pulmonary disease by pulling medical data from the Thomson Reuters MarketScan Commercial Claims and Encounters and Health and Productivity Management Research databases.

The Conclusion

The results of the study positively conclude and support a direct relationship between medication users and absenteeism in the work space. Employees that were adherent to their diabetes, hypertension, dyslipidemia and asthma/COPD medications missed 1.7 to 7.1 fewer days than non-adherent employees. This information provides an opportunity for companies to adopt a behavioral approach to enacting change, in addition to popular holistic approaches currently being discussed.

Although many studies have been conducted to identify and report absenteeism and presenteeism, few compare the causality which identifies the driving force it. Many companies today continue to bear the fiduciary responsibility for managing their benefit plans and mitigating medical and pharmacy claim exposure. Among other positive health outcomes and total medical cost savings, appropriate management of chronic conditions can help employers minimize losses due to missed work as well.

Educating employees about their medications and modifying habits will result in increased adherence to prescribed maintenance medications, as well as illuminating other blind spots. This awareness will not eliminate absenteeism or presenteeism; however, taking steps to empower discussions between employees and their healthcare providers is a proven step towards addressing lost productivity in the workforce and reducing unnecessary progressions in chronic conditions and their impact on an employer’s bottom line.