

EMPLOYEES WHO SMOKE CAN COST YOU: SO HOW ABOUT DOING SOMETHING

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Corporate Wellness Magazine featured Kytile Frye's article "Employees who Smoke can Cost You: So How about Doing Something" on July 4, 2014.

Kytile's article addresses the challenges of today's business environment, with increasing government regulation and marked uncertainty, wise employers want to do whatever they can to be in a position to manage their costs and to increase employee productivity. With the passage of the Affordable Care Act, most employers have had to deal with hefty increases in their health insurance premiums, and it seems unavoidable that this disturbing trend will continue, if not accelerate. Faced with that dismal prospect, employers have begun to think about certain lifestyle choices of their employees such as obesity and heavy alcohol consumption and how those choices might actually have a direct impact on their business. One lifestyle choice with often-huge adverse effects, not just on the cost of health insurance but also on the business itself, is smoking and the use of other tobacco products.

When most people think about the impact of smoking, they tend to focus on a smoker's potential health issues. There have been numerous studies focused on smoking and its deleterious effects on the smoker's productivity as an employee, and the results are shocking. A recent study involving 20,000 employees revealed that smokers had more hospital visits per 1,000 than non-smokers (124 vs. 76) had, had a longer average length of stay in the hospital as compared to non-smokers (6.5 vs. 5 days) and made six more visits to healthcare facilities per year than non-smokers. Another study found that smokers missed an average of 6.16 days of work per year as opposed to the 3.86 days missed by non-smokers and that a smoker taking four 10-minute smoke breaks actually worked one month less over the course of a year than did a non-smoking employee.

NBC News recently reported on a massive new study by two economists on the effects of smoking in the workplace. They examined not just absenteeism and the impact of smoke breaks, but also the effect of smoking on an employee's productivity while actually at work.

Smoking is clearly the kind of lifestyle choice that impacts healthcare costs and may legitimately affect premium rates, but are there pitfalls and dangers in imposing additional costs on smokers?

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