

Health

Mind clients' Ps and Qs for smoking cessation

BY BETH TAYLOR

Smoking costs a whole lot more than the price of cigarettes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identified tobacco use as the single most preventable cause of disease, disability and death. Health-related economic losses from smoking are an astounding \$193 billion. Most of the cost (\$97 billion) is from lost productivity. The problem is simply too big to ignore. Recommending a smoking cessation program for your clients is solid advice.

The following builds the foundation for an effective smoking cessation program.

Policies on smoking in the workplace must be in place and communicated prior to the start of the smoking cessation program. Your clients' legal counsel should review policies for compliance with legal interpretations. The most effective policies define the intent of the policy, enforcement procedures and the available resources for support. The policy should identify individuals it applies to — for example, all full and part-time employees and visitors.

It is a good idea to include smoking and non-smoking employees in the development of the policy. Emphasize the company's intent: to combat the effects of smoking, not to target smokers. Provide thorough training for management so they understand the provisions of the policy and their role in enforcing them.

Allow plenty of lead time before initiating the policy for successful education and promotion campaigns. Sufficient time also allows employees to participate in support programs so they have an opportunity to quit before the policy restrictions apply. Utilize extensive communication to build to the policy "kick-off" day. Make it a positive event.

Planning for the smoking cessation program is a long-range project. Your clients should allow at least six to nine

months — the more time allowed, the better.

Examples of proven effective start dates are:

January — as part of New Year's resolutions;

June/July — when it is too hot to smoke; and

November — as part of the American Cancer Society's Great American Smoke-out*.

Plan the smoking cessation program in stages. Stage 1 establishes your client's message and the reasons why they are starting a smoking cessation program. Stage 2 sets the timeline. Allow time for discussions with senior management, information gathering and a review of policies, programs and vendors. Stage 3 determines the support system for the program. Include workplace policies, benefit coverage, incentives and resources. And contingency plans should be in place to cope with any potential backlash.

There are countless free resources for smoking cessation. Help your clients review those resources, as well as fee-based enhanced services, such as coaching. Start by looking at local resources. Most states offer free resources for smoking cessation. Many have local versions of federal programs like 1-800-QuitNow or 1-800-44U-Quit. The government Web site at smokefree.gov offers links to state-specific programs. The American Cancer Society at 1-800-ACS-2345 or cancer.org; the American Lung Association at 1-800-Lung-USA or lungusa.org; and Ex at becomeanex.org are all great resources. The Top Consumer Reviews Web site lists the top 10 over-the-counter resources at topconsumerreviews.com/stop-smoking.

Don't forget about the carriers that offer smoking cessation programs and resources through their Web sites and physician referrals. There really is no need

to reinvent the wheel.

Promotion is a sensitive and critical element for the smoking cessation program. Strike the wrong chord and all the planning and resources will not overcome a hostile response from employees. The right incentives encourage greater participation. Use the selected resources for ideas on incentives. Combine incentives with other interventions and support to reduce tobacco use.

Successful smoking cessation programs address all life issues related to smoking, like weight loss/gain, nutritional deficiencies and stress. Integrating a smoking cessation program into an overall wellness strategy allows for additional incentives, such as reimbursing copays for prescriptions or counseling for smoking cessation. Other incentives include lower premiums for non-smokers and earning points for smoke-free days with a reward system providing cash or other prizes.

Your client's smoking policy is more than rules and procedures. It provides additional support for reducing tobacco use. Banning or restricting smoking in designated areas and creating an even-handed policy for smokers and non-smokers regarding work breaks are examples of supportive policy provisions. And effective promotion of the program spells success.

Quitting smoking has immediate health benefits for employees and reduces annual medical and life insurance costs for your clients. The low cost of implementing a smoking cessation program combined with reduced economic losses for your client provide firm support evidence for decision-makers. Supportive policies, thorough planning and effective promotion deliver a smoking cessation program in which everyone wins. **EBA**

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