
LiveWell: Integrating a Chronic Disease Self-Management Model Into Workplace Health Promotion

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Abstract: Chronic diseases are the leading cause of death of Thurston County residents. Since employed adults spend more than half of their waking hours at work, the workplace is an ideal setting for interventions that improve employee health. Chronic disease interventions in the workplace have typically focused on “prevention,” with a relatively healthy population of employees in mind, not “disease management,” among employees who have already developed a chronic health condition. Many public health professionals and employers do not realize that chronic disease self-management among chronically ill employees is critical to decreasing the risk of complications and increasing quality of life, as well as improving workplace productivity. With this in mind, the Chronic Disease Prevention unit at the Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department partnered with a local independent physician’s association and incorporated LiveWell, an evidence-based chronic disease self-management model, into their WorkWell program. WorkWell is designed to promote worksite policy, practice and environment changes that improve employee health, through collaboration between public health and employers. It has been found that this chronic disease self-management model can gain acceptance among employers and can be effectively implemented in a workplace environment. Employees who have completed the LiveWell workshop report an increase in self-efficacy, improved communication with health care providers, and a decrease in “presenteeism,” which is defined as lost productivity due to employees actually showing up for work, but not being fully engaged and productive because of personal health and life issue distractions. Presenteeism is estimated to be up to 7 ½ times more costly to employers than absenteeism. Integrating a chronic disease self-management model into the workplace environment may be a cost-effective way for employers to reduce absenteeism and boost productivity among employees, while delaying further development of chronic disease.