

The HR Specialist

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On-site Clinics Make a Comeback: Are They Right for You?

Issue: *High health care costs and the wellness trend are bringing on-site medical clinics back to the workplace.*

Benefit: *This isn't just a big-company trend. Even small firms can benefit from a part-time nurse.*

Action: *Use the following information and chart to prepare a good ROI case for the need to institute an on-site medical staff.*

The No. 1 reason people don't visit a doctor when they're sick is because they don't want to miss work, says Dr. Stephen Hamersky, VP of health services at American Express.

So, his company, like 100 of the 1,000 largest U.S. employers, brought the doctors to work.

On-site clinics are less common than they were a few decades ago, when the company doctor was as much a fixture as the school nurse. But the high cost of health care—and the trend toward focusing on prevention and wellness as ways to lower those costs—is bringing them back into vogue.

Firms like Nissan, Citibank, JPMorgan Chase and Harrah's offer varying levels of on-site care to employees who need allergy shots, have the sniffles, get hurt on the job or are dealing with chronic illnesses. On-site clinics help employers intervene in workers' health concerns early on, which cuts down on specialty and emergency-room care.

Sound out of reach for your organization? Maybe not.

More smaller businesses are also offering preventive health screenings or even banding together with other firms and associations to offer employees part-time nursing care. (See chart at end of article.)

Kay Curling, director of work/life solutions at SRA International based in Fairfax, Va., calculates that her high-tech firm, with 2,100 employees, saves \$3.50 for every dollar it spends on its small clinic and three nurses. The dollars are saved through fewer sick days and health care claims, earlier return to work in disability cases, and the discounts the nurses have negotiated with providers.

Plus, if it weren't for the on-site clinic, many employees wouldn't seek medical treatment at all.

That point is key: On-site clinics allow employees to miss less work and feel better while they're on the clock.

Clinic nurses can also teach patients how to prevent problems, screen mammograms and conduct blood-pressure checks, all of which lower the health care costs for participants even more.

| If you employ . . . | You could benefit from . . . | To provide . . . |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| Up to 200 employees | A part-time staff nurse | Wellness, prevention, disability and disease management |
| 250 to 500 employees | A full-time nurse | All of the above |
| 500 to 1,000 employees | A nurse practitioner, plus a registered nurse | All of the above, plus care for episodic acute illnesses (e.g., sore throats, migraines, etc.) |
| 1,000 to 1,500 employees | A part-time physician | All of the above, plus some primary care services |
| 1,500+ employees | A full-time physician | Full-blown primary care services; a full-service pharmacy |