

Spring 2015

Improving Clemson's Employee Wellness Program

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Recommended Citation

Moore, Caitlin; Clements, Nicole; and Stonecypher, Grace, "Improving Clemson's Employee Wellness Program" (2015). *Focus on Creative Inquiry*. 113.
<https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/foci/113>

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CU4Health: Clemson University's Employee Wellness Program

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Abstract

The nurse-managed Joseph F. Sullivan Center of Clemson University operates an incentive based employee wellness program called CU4Health. In order to determine the effectiveness of the program, researchers from Clemson University's School of Nursing analyzed the return of investment from the program, defined by the improvement of participants' health, which was scored by eight biomarkers. This research displays evidence that participation in Clemson University's employee wellness program is associated with overall healthier biomarkers, therefore supporting the implementation and continuance of the CU4Health.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to determine the relationship between participation in the Joseph F. Sullivan Center's employee wellness program and improvement in employees' health, as demonstrated by an improvement in overall health wellness score and seven health biomarkers (blood pressure, body mass index, total cholesterol, high density lipoprotein, low density lipoprotein, triglycerides, and glucose level).

Hypothesis

An increased involvement in the employee wellness program, CU4Health, demonstrated by attending multiple counseling sessions, will result in increased health of employees as well as reduced healthcare costs for Clemson University.

Problem Statement

The increasing incidence of chronic disease and preventable illness in combination with the rising costs of healthcare prompts employers to seek creative means of preventing illness and promoting healthy behaviors among employees.

Study Aim

The aim of this study is to evaluate if increased involvement in CU4Health produces an improvement in health biomarkers.

Review of Literature

Recent studies have determined that workplace employee wellness programs are most effective when they are specifically designed for their target population. Employee wellness programs may not only improve the employees' health status, but also decrease health costs and provide a positive return of investment for the company. Online formats of wellness programs tend to yield better results.

Data Collection

- Individuals had eight biomarkers measured at each visit: systolic BP, diastolic BP, BMI, total cholesterol, HDL, LDL, triglycerides, and glucose level.
- An overall wellness rating was calculated based on the eight biomarkers. This rating was scored using an algorithm supplied by the charting program WellSuite.
- Data was organized in a spreadsheet to analyze differences in biomarker levels between the three groups.
- Trends of biomarker values over time for Group 3 were analyzed for changes between the multiple counseling sessions.
- Whether the biomarkers improved, declined, or remained the same for the individuals was determined.

Data Analysis

- 3 sample groups:
- Group 1: CU4Health employee participants who did not attend follow-up counseling sessions
 - Group 2: CU4Health employee participants who attended one follow-up counseling session
 - Group 3: CU4Health employee participants who attended five or more follow-up counseling sessions

Results

	GROUP 1	GROUP 2	GROUP 3
SYSTOLIC BP	120	117	119
DIASTOLIC BP	79	75	77
BMI	29	25	26
TOTAL CHOLESTEROL	197	180	117
HDL	58	54	55
LDL	119	102	112
TRIGLYCERIDES	127	111	117
GLUCOSE	94	88	92
OVERALL WELLNESS RATING	69	71	73

Discussion

- Individuals have different motivations to participate in the CU4Health employee wellness program and to attend follow-up counseling sessions.
- A certain amount of internal motivation is needed for participants to seek follow-up consultation. This could explain why Group 1 had the lowest health biomarkers.
- Participants who already have a healthy lifestyle may not be interested in following up with a wellness program if an initial appointment confirmed their healthy habits.
- Group 2 members may have been the healthiest from the beginning and participated in the program long enough to confirm their current lifestyles were healthy, while Group 3 participants had major changes to make in order to become healthy and needed more counseling.

Future Recommendations

- More enticing incentives are needed in order to supply enough external motivation for participants to effect change.
- High quality incentives will also encourage participants who already have healthy habits to stay in the program and receive regular wellness checks.
- In order to initiate and then maintain participant engagement in CU4Health, the Sullivan Center will need to commit to developing marketing strategies and attractive incentives.

Conclusion

Increased involvement in the CU4Health employee wellness program is associated with healthier biomarkers and a higher overall wellness score. This supports the continuation of Clemson University's program and provides evidence that increased investment will yield a positive return on investment.