



From the desk of our Program Coordinator..... Let's talk!

What Employers Need to Know

Printed from National Business Group on Health website (www.BusinessGroupHealth.org) Oct 4, 2011

Impact of Advanced Illness on the Workplace: What Employers Need to Know

Planning for the Inevitable

In a culture that celebrates youth, issues related to aging and caring for people who have terminal illness are often overlooked, if not neglected altogether — until they must be faced. For a growing number of people, that time is now. In 2000, there were 35 million Americans ages 65 years or older; in a little less than 10 years, that figure will rise to 55 million.

It's hard to think rationally about a loved one whose health is declining or is becoming incapable of self-care. Planning for the needs of a loved one prior to these naturally occurring events and anticipating the grief and bereavement when that person dies is a difficult and emotionally-laden process. But failing to plan ahead before a parent or a family member develops incapacitating disease such as heart disease, cancer or dementia brings greater risks.

In fact, caring for the elderly is not the only potential challenge. Sometimes a child, a spouse, a partner or a friend becomes ill unexpectedly, and one is called upon to provide care.

Postponing decisions about the end of life and failing to prepare the required resources — whether for palliative, hospice or some other form of caregiving — can lead to inferior care for the loved one, and the possibility of a disruptive effect on the lives of those who are attending to the loved one's needs.

How Employers Are Affected

Why do employers have an important stake in matters related to caring for those whose health have been seriously compromised? Baby boomers are staying in the workforce for longer periods due to rising health costs and economic uncertainty. At the same time, this post-World War II generation is positioned to assist those now needing care. A recent study found that 73% of caregivers were employed at some time while they were providing care to a family member.

This means that absenteeism and diminished on-the-job productivity, resulting from workers providing care to family members, will play a greater role in corporate well-being.

