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What's Turnover Got to Do with It?

An employee group's average age, social-economic status, and education-level are all important for designing health management programs. But what about turnover? Turnover may well be more important than anything else – it will affect everything from the kinds of illnesses to the effectiveness of different strategies.

For example, imagine a workforce that is 60 percent female. The average age of the females is 37 and the average age of the males is 32. Females also have a longer length of employment than the males: females averaged 4.5 years while males only stayed 3.7 years. How does knowing this help shape the health program?

This workforce had more expenses for back pain and leisure-time injuries than for child birth. In order to curb the weekend warrior injuries, the plan needed to offer shorter-term incentives – such as a half day's vacation or comp time in exchange for completing a ski safety course. The shorter-term incentives will be more successful for the younger and shorter-term segment of the workforce.

Childbirth is also a short-term health event. A closer look at the females showed that those of child-bearing age stayed with employer only slightly longer than the males. These women also had a lower average salary than the group as a whole. The employer could offer a small cash incentive to women who enrolled in an ante-natal (if they are planning a pregnancy, this is before conception) program. By paying the incentive into a child care reimbursement account, the employer could also reward mothers who returned after maternity leave.

Now imagine a very different workforce: average age for males and females is 44, and the average length of employment is 10 years. The workforce has only a slight majority of females. This group's costs will show more illness that is the result of long-term issues and behaviors. The employer has a long-term workforce, and therefore needs longer-term strategies that match the group's chronic diseases.

The demographics and employment patterns of the workforce should guide all health planning. A long-term strategy, such as fitness programs or nutrition support, would have little or no effect on the health costs of a short-term workforce. Unless the strategy matches the health problems and the workforce, it will miss its target every time.