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New Ways to Cut Health Costs

You notice your group's health insurance claims going up dramatically. The company is going through tough times – announcing layoffs, cutting overtime, and reorganizing work teams. There is no money for a wellness program. What can you do to ease health costs and improve employee health?

- A. Create a walking trail around the company offices.
- B. Train managers to treat employees fairly.
- C. Keep employees informed about what is happening in the company.

Surprise: All three of these could boost employee health.

Bigger surprise: Option A, the walking trail, is the least likely to have a broad impact, while options B and C have been proven in peer-reviewed studies to improve employee health. Why is that? The walking trail would only have an impact on the people who used it. By contrast, the work environment affects everyone who works there.

There is a strong body of research about the psycho-social environment of the work place, and how it can shape employee health. Hundreds of studies, following tens of thousands of employees for years have found connections between workplace factors and seeing lower incidence of depression, heart disease, alcoholism, diabetes, and obesity. Even employees who come to work prone to heart disease will have fewer heart attacks, if their work place is fair. In other words, employers can make a significant impact on heart disease just by treating people more respectfully. At last, there is a wellness strategy that does not involve begging or bribing employees to go to the gym or to eat more vegetables.

Health Economy is working with a client to develop an online tool for employers to assess their work environment and estimate the health costs they could save by improving it. If you are interested in learning more, [drop me a line](#).

By Linda K. Riddell, MS
Health Economy, LLC
www.HealthEconomy.net