



Case Study August 2012

Wellness Metrics in Action Toronto East General Hospital: Evaluation Through Feedback

Toronto East General Hospital (TEGH) is an award-winning urban hospital that has served southeast Toronto since 1929.¹ TEGH provides an extensive range of ambulatory (outpatient), in-patient, and community-based programs and services, and it prides itself on being Ontario's leading community teaching hospital. The hospital employs more than 2,500 people, including 475 physicians and midwives.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS FOCUS

In 2004, motivated by a new CEO, TEGH decided to focus its wellness initiative on a physical exercise program that included an on-site gym, yoga classes, and a cardio room. TEGH's regular fitness classes are fully funded by participating staff, who pay \$6 every two weeks.

In 2009, after a survey was conducted to obtain feedback from staff, the program was revamped to also address employees' mental health. Recognizing it needed to address common challenges facing health care workers (e.g., compassion fatigue, emotional intelligence, and excessive stress), TEGH partnered with its employee

¹ This case study is based on information from Kristen Winter (Manager, Human Resources and Organizational Wellness, Toronto East General Hospital). Interview by Louise Chénier and Crystal Hoganson, January 18, 2012.

About This Series

The Conference Board of Canada recently published a report, *Making the Business Case for Investments in Workplace Health and Wellness*,¹ that provides small, medium-sized, and large organizations with advice on how to measure the impact of their workplace health and wellness programs. The report identifies practical, research-backed approaches to measurement, as well as a variety of tools and metrics, that employers can use to demonstrate the return on investment of their health and wellness initiatives.

Research for the report, which included an in-depth review of the literature, identified several employers that are currently evaluating the impact of wellness programs on their organizations. These leaders have invaluable information and guidance to offer to other employers that are trying to measure the impact of their own health and wellness initiatives. This briefing is the second in a series of case studies that profile these organizations, their wellness programs, and the methods they use to evaluate their initiatives.

1 Chénier, Hoganson, and Thorpe, *Making the Business Case for Investments in Workplace Health and Wellness*.

assistance program (EAP) provider (Morneau Shepell) and benefits provider (Standard Life) to incorporate lunch and learns, special training tools for managers, and critical incident counselling.

TEGH's health and wellness program includes more than just initiatives to address physical and mental wellness. It also features staff appreciation days and an exceptional workplace violence program that includes equipping staff with Vocera communication devices. These devices, similar to walkie-talkies, enable team members to communicate instantly with one another and with security personnel. There is also a locating system on the devices so an employee in a threatening situation can be easily found.

MEASUREMENT, EVALUATION, AND RETURN ON INVESTMENT

TEGH tracks participation in the health and wellness program to determine which types of classes are most popular and to modify schedules accordingly. As well,

TEGH conducts exit interviews when employees leave the wellness program. By learning why employees withdraw from the program, the hospital can discover areas where improvements are required.

Further, TEGH tracks the number of EAP calls by category of call. This helps indicate what type of lunch-and-learn programming to focus on. Each year, Standard Life provides TEGH with a health benefit diagnostic analysis that helps identify health trends and areas where preventive strategies may be required. This analysis examines health claims (such as prescription drug claims) by category (e.g., cardiovascular, musculoskeletal, and psychological) in terms of dollars and number of claims. A similar analysis is provided for long-term disability (LTD) claims.

TEGH attributes its program's success to strong support from the executive team, the partnerships it has with its vendors, and constant evaluation and openness.

Short-term disability (STD) claims are managed internally by TEGH's occupational health and safety department. The department focuses less on analyzing STD claims and more on ensuring the safe and timely return to work of employees on STD leave. For example, it keeps in touch with these employees while they are on leave and helps them return to work by arranging modified hours or roles, as needed.

I think the key to any program, wellness or otherwise, is to never be satisfied with what you are doing, to constantly look at what you are doing and say, "We can do it better."

—Kristen Winter, Manager, Human Resources and Organizational Wellness, TEGH

TEGH also conducts annual surveys, asking specific questions about the wellness program to ensure the program continues to meet the needs of employees. The results of these surveys indicate an increase in staff engagement and overall appreciation of the program. For instance, the 2011 staff satisfaction survey revealed that 71.6 per cent of TEGH staff agree or strongly agree that their organization promotes staff health and wellness. This compares with only 50.6 per cent on average from a number of hospitals across Ontario.

The hospital has also seen improvements in recruitment and retention since the wellness program was implemented.

CHALLENGES

TEGH recognizes the importance of measuring wellness programs; however, it is also aware that confounding factors could influence the results. For instance, a number of factors (other than the wellness program) could potentially influence absenteeism rates. Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether the wellness program has actually had a direct impact on absenteeism rates.

ADVICE FOR OTHERS

TEGH attributes the success of its program to strong support from the executive team and to the partnerships it has established with its vendors, Morneau Shepell and

Standard Life. Each has hosted a variety of courses, provided excellent resources and information, and helped to successfully manage TEGH's LTD cases.

TEGH advises other employers to realize they have the potential to benefit their organizations through health and wellness programming. Even though employees may appear hesitant or resistant to change, they will change if given the right opportunities. Constant evaluation and openness to improvement are important contributors to successful, sustainable wellness programs.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chénier, Louise, Crystal Hoganson, and Karla Thorpe. *Making the Business Case for Investments in Workplace Health and Wellness*. Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada, 2012.

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Toronto East General Hospital: Evaluation Through Feedback by Crystal Hoganson

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