



Does Dental Matter?

Studies show employees value dental benefits

The economy continues to look up, but the fact remains that most companies are running leaner than they did just a few years ago. While companies are faced with the necessity of doing more with less, employee expectations haven't changed much, particularly when it comes to dental benefits.

A survey released in May 2002 by market researchers Taylor Nelson/Sofres Intersearch assessed several aspects of American attitudes regarding dental benefits. Nearly 80 percent of respondents felt it is "very important" or "somewhat important" to have dental insurance provided by a prospective employer. Most did not view rising medical costs as a plausible reason for cutting dental benefits.

Of course, employee expectations and bottom-line considerations are not always compatible. Although dental benefits play a role in helping attract qualified workers and managing overall health care costs, many companies have had to scrutinize every piece of their compensation and benefits packages, dental included.

Real Health Benefits

Employees and their families spend less time at the dentist when they get access to services that prevent or fix dental problems before time-consuming remedies are required. It is estimated that 20.5 million workdays are lost annually to oral health problems, and 117,000 school hours are missed every year for every 100,000 students due to oral health problems.

And when you consider the links between oral health and general health, dental benefits can help employees stay healthier and on the job—especially important when leaner workforces call for peak productivity.

In the past few years, the mouth's central role in general health has been covered in news reports and the landmark "Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General" (2000). Studies indicate that the bacteria that cause gum disease might aggravate other health problems, including respiratory illness, cardiovascular disease, preterm deliveries of low-birth-weight babies and diabetes. Some conditions, such as anemia and osteoporosis, have symptoms or manifestations that appear in the mouth.

Taking oral health seriously is prudent not only for its own sake, but as a way to help prevent or manage the effects of other diseases. In addition, better oral health maintains employees' productivity and protects groups' bottom lines.

78.6% of respondents felt it is "very important" or "somewhat important" to have dental insurance provided by a prospective employer.

Source: Taylor Nelson/Sofres Intersearch and Delta Dental

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