

Wanted: Health Coaches to Live Better, and Longer

Health coaching is spreading as a growing number of companies try to play a more active role in helping their workers and members stay healthy and better manage chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.

Getting a regular call from a nurse on how to handle your heart condition or diabetes might sound like a hassle. But for many patients, it's increasingly helpful and improving their existing care routine.

Health coaching services are typically provided in conjunction with the health benefit plan. Nearly all of the interaction between coach and the member happens over the telephone.

The coach's role can range from simple -- helping a member remember to take medicine properly or keep appointments with doctors -- to complex, such as answering questions about insurance benefits or helping with a medical care decision. Health professionals, particularly registered nurses, can address a range of questions to improve member awareness on controlling their disease.

An educated patient is a better health care consumer. Dr. Luke Burchard, medical director of iHealth™, a wellness education program, indicated that most doctors like the service because coached patients tend to be better informed about their health, and more helpful to their physicians.

"When a nurse can connect on a personal level with a patient, and help to engage them with their health problems, it can be such a relief," Burchard said. "There is so much published information and many patients can't process it alone."

Through wellness education and disease management, patients learn how to improve their overall health. It is well known that early intervention in diseases such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease can significantly improve health and lower health care costs. Many of the most costly and deadly illnesses known today are either preventable through education and life-style change, or curable with early detection.

Evidence suggests that these programs are reducing complications from chronic conditions and decreasing hospital admissions. Increased awareness is helping prevent long-term complications from unmanaged health conditions.

With health benefit costs rising, companies are seeking programs that will help members to improve their health condition and lower health benefit costs.

Source: Luke Burchard, MD, MMM, FAAFP, DABFP, DABMM
Medical Director of iHealth™