



The 10 Benefits of Conducting a Personal Health Assessment

By David Hunnicutt, PhD



Personal health assessments are red-hot right now—and for good reason. With healthcare costs estimated to increase to more than \$4 trillion by 2016, personal health assessments will help to ameliorate some of these costs by providing individuals with much needed health information so that they can manage their current health status and, perhaps even more importantly, prevent health problems before they occur. Moreover, personal health assessments, if used strategically, will aid employers in better understanding the collective health risks of their employee populations—thus allowing them to incorporate important and necessary interventions that will effectively address unhealthy behaviors at the workplace. Last but not least, personal health assessments will play a critical role in bridging the gap between employer, employee, and the healthcare system as personal health assessments in the future will ensure that health information moves beyond the employer and the employee.

When viewed in this context, it's easy to see how personal health assessments will play an important role in improving individual health status as well as containing costs. In this article, it is our intent to provide important information concerning the specific benefits of conducting a personal health assessment within a large, medium, or small-sized business.

Benefit #1: Personal Health Assessments Provide Employees With A Snapshot of Their Current Health Status

The first benefit of providing a

personal health assessment at the workplace is that it will give participants an important snapshot of their current health status. While this might seem like small potatoes, the reality is that this is a very big deal. Sadly, most employees have no idea of what their current health status is. As a result, most employees go through days, weeks, and years without paying attention to the behaviors that can be modified in order to maintain or improve their present health status. By offering a personal health assessment at the workplace, each and every employee will have the opportunity to better understand their current health status.

Benefit #2: Personal Health Assessments Bring With Them The Potential To Monitor Individual Health Status Over Time

For more than 50 years, HR and benefit executives have been working with employees to help them prepare for retirement. By encouraging and enrolling employees in company benefit plans like 401Ks and 403Bs, employees have the opportunity to set aside a portion of each paycheck that can be invested and grow tax-free. And, by participating in these benefit plans, employees can set aside enough money to retire without worries. What's interesting about this process is that employees will begin about 40 years before they retire and they'll receive a quarterly statement to let them know how their retirement funds are doing.

Unlike retirement plans, employees generally have no clue as to what their health status is and has been over time. As a result, most employees come face-to-face with their present health status when they have their first heart attack or

other major health concern. And unfortunately, because these events generally occur later in life, most employees have little time to make amends in terms of re-establishing their health status so that they can finish their careers and maintain their health in retirement. Personal health assessments have the power to change this predictable course of events. Specifically, by completing an annual personal health assessment each employee will know what their personal health status is and has been for the last 20-30 years.

Benefit #3: Personal Health Assessments Provide Employees With Concrete Information Thus Preparing Them For Lifestyle Change

Another benefit of offering a personal health assessment at the workplace is that the process generally lays the foundation for making important changes. Specifically, when employees complete their personal health assessment and receive their customized health reports—and perhaps even have the opportunity to sit down with a health advisor—employees not only better understand their present health status, but they also come face-to-face with the changes that must be made in order to maintain or improve certain health conditions. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand the impact that is experienced by a person who sees for the first time, in black and white, that they are at high-risk for cancer, heart disease, or other largely preventable health-related issues. By going through the PHA process, individuals become much more in tune with respect to making important changes concerning their present health practices.



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Wellstream
Health Risk Assessment

INSTRUCTIONS

This personal health assessment should take only 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Your participation is completely voluntary. By completing this health survey, you will receive important feedback concerning your health status and what you can do to become healthier. Please answer all questions and complete the survey to the best of your ability. Your information and personal responses will be kept strictly confidential.

- Use a Number 2 pencil only.
- Print clearly in the boxes and make heavy black marks, filling the whole box completely.
- Eraser changes clearly, and do not make any stray marks.
- Do not fold or write on the questionnaire.

Proper Mark: ●
Improper Marks: ✓ ✗

NAME AND ADDRESS — PRINT CLEARLY

FIRST NAME: _____ LAST NAME: _____

HOME ADDRESS: _____ APARTMENT #: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

DAYTIME PHONE: _____ EVENING PHONE: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

DATE BORN (MM/DD/YYYY): _____ BIRTHDATE (MM/DD/YYYY): _____

UNIQUE IDENTIFIER: _____

Section 1: Questions About You

Q1 What is your gender?
 Male
 Female

Q2 How long have you been in the U.S.?
 _____ Years

Q3 What is your race/ethnicity?
 African American/Black
 American Indian or Alaska Native
 Asian or Pacific Islander
 Caucasian/White
 Hispanic
 Other or mixed race/ethnicity

Q4 What is your height? (5 Feet _____)
 _____ Feet _____ Inches

Q5 What is your weight?
 _____ Weight in pounds

Q6 What is your marital status?
 Single/Never Married
 Married/With Partner
 Divorced/Separated
 Widowed

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THE 10 BENEFITS OF CONDUCTING A PERSONAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT

BENEFIT #1	Personal Health Assessments Provide Employees With A Snapshot Of Their Current Health Status
BENEFIT #2	Personal Health Assessments Bring With Them The Potential To Monitor Individual Health Status Over Time
BENEFIT #3	Personal Health Assessments Provide Employees With Concrete Information Thus Preparing Them For Lifestyle Change
BENEFIT #4	Personal Health Assessments Help Individuals Get Involved With Health Coaching
BENEFIT #5	Personal Health Assessments Provide Important Information Concerning Employees' Readiness To Change
BENEFIT #6	Personal Health Assessments Help Employers Measure And Monitor Population Health Status
BENEFIT #7	Personal Health Assessments Provide Employers With Important Information That Can Help Them Build Results-Oriented Health Promotion Programs
BENEFIT #8	Personal Health Assessments Can Provide Employers With Important Information On Productivity
BENEFIT #9	Personal Health Assessments Allow Employers To Evaluate Changes In Health Behavior And Health Risks Over Time
BENEFIT #10	Personal Health Assessments Engage Both Employers And Employees In The Health Management Process

Benefit #4:

Personal Health Assessments Help Individuals Get Involved With Health Coaching

Another important benefit of offering a personal health assessment at the workplace is that each time the PHA is administered; an employee is presented with an excellent opportunity to “opt-in” to health coaching services or personal health counseling. Indeed, when an employee participates in a personal health assessment they are confronted with the question, “If there is a concern or a significant health risk, please have a health professional contact me.” A question like this (or a similarly worded question) will give the individual an opportunity to indicate in the assessment itself if they are interested in taking part in a health behavior change initiative. This is a very powerful component of a personal health assessment given the fact that when an employee opts-in, the employer or a third-party provider has been given the go ahead to contact this person to get them enrolled in the behavior change process.

Benefit #5:

Personal Health Assessments Provide Important Information Concerning Employees' Readiness To Change

Believe it or not, personal health assessments provide important information concerning an individual's readiness to make lifestyle changes. By utilizing the contributions made by Dr. James Prochaska's pioneering work, the vast majority of personal health assessments incorporate “stage-based” questions. By utilizing this information, corporate wellness practitioners and health coaches gain valuable insights into how



amenable employees are to change certain behaviors. For example, if an individual has indicated in their PHA that they have been a lifelong smoker, stage-based questions will assess whether or not the individual is ready to address this behavior. If the individual is in the contemplation or preparation phase, health coaches and health counselors will begin deploying behavior-change strategies that will increase the likelihood that this individual will take on and succeed in a smoking-cessation program. Likewise if the individual is in pre-contemplation, health coaches can implement powerful strategies that can prepare the groundwork for advancing this individual into the contemplation, preparation, and action phases. Wherever the individual is with respect to the stages of change, a personal health assessment can help to identify and prescribe the right message at the right time.

Benefit #6: Personal Health Assessments Help Employers Measure And Monitor Population Health Status

From an organizational perspective, one of the most significant benefits of conducting a personal health assessment in the workplace is the aggregate report that the employer receives when the annual process is completed. This report is the lynchpin in measuring and monitoring the collective health of the organization's population. And, by offering the personal health assessment annually to all employees, an employer will be able to not only collect population health information, but they will also be able to assess collective health trends over time.

Similar to how an employee would monitor their own individual health

status over time, this aggregated report provides senior-level decision makers with demographic and health trends that will allow them to make the determination if their collective employee health is improving, declining, or staying the same. Without this report, an employer is essentially "flying blind."

Benefit #7: Personal Health Assessments Provide Employers With Important Information That Can Help Them Build Results-Oriented Health Promotion Programs

Contained within the covers of the PHA aggregate report is the essential population-based health information necessary to guide an employer's efforts with respect to developing a results-oriented health promotion program. For example, a good aggregate report is going to tell an employer not only what programs the organization needs to offer (cardiovascular, cancer, musculoskeletal, etc.), but also which programs employees are interested in participating in (walking, nutrition, stress management, etc.). When taken together, this information can be used to develop an effective workplace wellness program that will not only contain costs and improve employee health, but will engage employees in the process.

Benefit #8: Personal Health Assessments Can Provide Employers With Important Information On Productivity

As new research emerges, many employers are shocked to discover that the cost of lost productivity is about three times the annual cost

of healthcare. When you think about it, this is almost a mind-boggling phenomenon. And, while first generation personal health assessments focused primarily on health risk conditions, newer versions also incorporate important questions addressing productivity issues. For example, many personal health assessments will now ask questions that relate to "time off task," inability to concentrate, etc. Certainly having productivity-related data broadens an employer's understanding of the true costs related to poor health practices at the workplace.

Benefit #9: Personal Health Assessments Allow Employers To Evaluate Changes In Health Behavior And Health Risks Over Time

Let's face it; evaluation is of enormous importance to HR executives and

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wellness professionals. If incorporated properly, personal health assessments can provide workplace wellness practitioners with truckloads of evaluation data. Not only will you be able to monitor changes in health risks over time, you'll also be able to detect subtle changes in health behaviors, attitudes, perceptions, self-efficacy, and readiness—all of which further indicate whether or not the program is working. To date, literally hundreds and hundreds of workplace wellness professionals are leveraging data generated from personal health assessments to justify their efforts and to build their program budgets.

Benefit #10: Personal Health Assessments Engage Both Employers And Employees In The Health Management Process

Far and away the most significant benefit of offering a personal health

assessment at the workplace is the fact that the entire process creates significant levels of engagement for both employers and employees. For some time now, we've been pushing the mantra that health promotion programs are something we do with and for employees...not something we do to them. Indeed, to be ultimately effective, we've got to engage not only every employee in the health behavior change process, but we need to engage every employer in the health management process

as well. Personal health assessments move us closer to this goal. In fact, one of the most pleasant surprises that we've seen over the last ten years is how personal health assessments have engaged both employers and employees in this important pursuit.

The bottom line is this: there are a number of benefits in offering a personal health assessment at the workplace—but none are as important as engagement.

Summary

In this article, we have discussed the benefits of providing personal health assessments in the workplace. In the rest of this issue of *Absolute Advantage*, we will drill down to explore the specific aspects of selecting and administering a personal health assessment that is right for your organization.

In closing, I'd like to acknowledge the pioneering work of Larry Chapman in laying out the need for and importance of providing personal health assessments in the workplace—no one has done it better. ★



ABOUT WELCOA

Based in Omaha, Nebraska, the Wellness Council of America was founded in 1987 as a national non-profit membership organization dedicated to promoting healthier life styles for all Americans, especially through health promotion initiatives at the worksite.

Working Well—Specifically, WELCOA focuses on building Well Workplaces—organizations that are dedicated to the health of their employees. The Well Workplace process provides business leaders and members with a structure or blue print to help their organizations build results-oriented wellness programs. Ultimately these programs help employees make better lifestyle choices, and positively impact the organization's bottom line. To date, over 700 companies have received the prestigious Well Workplace award.

Leading-Edge Wellness Information—In addition to helping organizations build structurally sound wellness programs, WELCOA serves as a national clearinghouse and information center on worksite wellness. WELCOA responds to thousands of requests for information and materials by publishing a number of source books, a monthly health and wellness newsletter, an extensive line of brochures, as well as conducting numerous training seminars.

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Dr. David Hunnicutt is the President of the Wellness Council of America. As a leader in the field of health promotion, his vision has led to the creation of numerous publications designed to link health promotion objectives to business outcomes.



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