



## **Alkar-RapidPak & Sani-Matic Wellness Initiatives**

You want to start a wellness program but don't know where or how to start. You're not alone. My advice is not to let the vast variety of potential programs overwhelm you. Pick a few to try and get going. I think you'll find the program will build on itself and it doesn't need to be very expensive.

At Alkar-RapidPak and Sani-Matic, we felt we needed to attack the issue of rising health costs through more than just changes to plan design and employee contributions. Rather than attack the symptom (health costs), it was time to do something about the source: lifestyle decisions of exercise, diet and weight.

We started by recruiting a group of employees to be our wellness committee. This was done to help with employee involvement and to spread the workload. We didn't want it to just be another human resources program. This committee has worked well. We have tried a number of programs and learned a lot about what works here and what doesn't.

Here are a few of the things we've done along with information on participation and costs. Clearly the most expensive program is the health risk assessments. However, we feel that health risk assessments is the cornerstone of our program because it increases the individual's awareness of health and lifestyle issues and gives the company information on areas to target with the other programs. Our total employment has been about 330 during the last year.

1. We offered company-paid health risk assessments to all employees. These assessments were done on company time and included a consultation on the employee's results. The company received aggregate information on the results. The assessments have been offered several times and about 150 employees have taken advantage of this program. In addition, the employee gets a \$10 per month discount on their employee medical contribution for participating. Total cost per participating employee is about \$165 per year including the fee for the assessment and the discount on their monthly contributions.
2. Holiday weight control was a fun challenge. Participation in our holiday season weight pool was fairly light in the first year with about 12 participants, but is expected to be higher in the second year. (Read about the weight pool at: <http://www.alliancehealthcoop.com/diabetes/AlkarRapidPakHolidayWeightMaintPool.pdf>.) The

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employees that participated paid for the cost of the program. The participant's name went in the hat for weekly cash prizes as long as she or he maintained her or his weight or lost weight over the month of December.

3. We offered flu shots to all employees. In 2003, we charged employees \$10 toward a cost of \$18. In 2004, we opened it to all employees and their dependents and decided to make it free. This expense is expected to be covered by reduced absenteeism and takes away excuses to not get a shot.
4. We introduced an eight week exercise challenge through a fitness program with prizes in the spring of 2004. (To read about the fitness program, please visit [http://www.alliancehealthcoop.com/diabetes/AlkarRapidPakFitnessProgram\\_prizes.pdf](http://www.alliancehealthcoop.com/diabetes/AlkarRapidPakFitnessProgram_prizes.pdf).) We had 95 people participate and split them into teams to accumulate points based on the amount of exercise they did each week. Each participant paid \$10 and received a pedometer. There were weekly prizes and grand prizes along with weekly random drawings. Overall cost, including the pedometers and prizes, was about \$2,500. Our next major exercise program, titled "1 Potato, 2 Potato, 3 Potato, 4" begins in October 2004.
5. We offer lunch time education programs on various topics. Recent ones included warning signs of a heart attack and exercise tips. We use an outside contractor at a cost of \$50-75 per program, covering 3 facilities or locations.
6. In addition, we have offered other programs such as:
  - Posters
  - Poker walk  
(<http://www.alliancehealthcoop.com/diabetes/Alkar-RapidPakPokerWalkProgram.pdf>)
  - Partial health club reimbursement
  - Discounts at health club
  - Paid annual club fees and deduct from pay check
  - Exercise equipment loans
  - Changes to vending machine selections  
(<http://www.alliancehealthcoop.com/diabetes/Alkar-RapidPak&Sani-MaticVendingMachineChanges.pdf>)
  - Smoking cessation program in planning stage

So, don't be afraid to get started and make mistakes. Employees will enjoy the programs and appreciate your efforts. Remember, this is a long-term process of changing lifestyles and getting healthier employees. The net effect should reduce your health costs.

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