

Who Is a Caregiver?

A caregiver is anyone providing or overseeing the activities of another person. For example, says Chuck Bongiovanni of CarePatrol, making a daily phone call to mom to make sure she's taking her medicine properly, scheduling doctor's appointments for dad, and making a few calls to find someone to clean the house once a week are all caregiving activities.

When MetLife published its eldercare study in 2006, nearly 60% of people caring for an adult over the age of 50 were working, the majority of them full-time.

But Bongiovanni reports that missing work to handle an eldercare situation is not considered as acceptable as missing work to care for an ill child.

"As a result, employees may not be completely honest with their employers about why they're missing work or why they're on the phone during work hours," Bongiovanni explains.

"People who are going through similar issues are very accepting of eldercare programs. But younger people, or those who have no experience with eldercare, often don't see the importance of it."

Make no mistake, though, he says: your employees are dealing with eldercare issues.

ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER

This newsletter is devoted to sharing compensation and benefits ideas that have worked for HR professionals striving to make a strategic difference in their companies. If you have a story you'd like to share, send us a fax at 860-510-7224.

If you have a question about one of the newsletter stories or want more information, call 800-727-5257, ext. 2194, or e-mail equayle@blr.com.

Benefits Corner

Eldercare Remains Silent Problem (But It Shouldn't)

Imagine an auditorium full of HR reps and managers, assembled to hear the latest about employee benefits. A hush falls over the crowd as Chuck Bongiovanni, founder and president of CarePatrol, takes the stage. He looks around the room, waits a moment, then asks the audience a pointed question: Can anyone in the room guarantee that one of their employees won't get a phone call this very day informing him or her that mom or dad is in the hospital and the employee needs to leave work immediately?

"That gets their attention," Bongiovanni says. It should get yours, too. According to a MetLife study published in 2006, the average cost to companies per full-time, employed caregiver is \$2,110 per year. As the population ages, the problems will increase. "We're going to have about 78 million people turning 65 shortly," Bongiovanni says.

Obviously, eldercare is an issue that needs to be addressed in the workplace. Employees may miss work to take care of things for an aging parent, or they may be at their desk but not have their minds on the job. Searching the Web, making phone calls, talking to co-workers about the issues—all are activities that take away productive hours from the workplace without necessarily solving anything.

That's where you come in. Bongiovanni recommends three important steps you can take to help employees deal with eldercare issues, thus saving in terms of money and productivity. First, be aware that it is an issue. Second, ask your employees about their experiences: "Survey employees, find out how many are actively caring for a loved one. And make sure they understand that caregiving isn't necessarily being there all the time." Don't ask, "Are you a caregiver?" Instead, ask employees if they help an elderly loved one set up doctors' appointments, organize their medicines, or perform other regular activities for them. The fact that they're providing care may surprise them, too.

Most important, you can find and offer resources in the community that shift some of the burden from your employees. CarePatrol's ElderBenefit program (www.elderbenefit.com) provides consultants who can advise employees and their elderly loved ones about issues they are facing and is free to both companies and their employees. Simply gathering information on some of your locale's resources and making sure employees know that the issue is important to you can go a long way toward retaining valued employees who are likely at the peak of their careers.

"Studies continue to show that eldercare issues will overshadow childcare issues in the next 5 years," says Bongiovanni. Ignoring the issue will not solve it. By addressing it, you can make things easier for your employees.