

Quitting Smoking: Can Employers Help?

(NAPSA)—Quitting smoking is hard, but there are people you can turn to for help, including your employer. Smoking leads to serious medical problems that can cost companies a lot of money, so employers stand to benefit from helping their employees go smoke-free.

For example, employees who smoke have health care costs that are 40 percent higher than non-smokers. Smokers also miss work 1.5 times more often than non-smokers. Between additional medical care and lost productivity, employers end up spending approximately \$4,400 extra per year in today's dollars for each employee who smokes.

In recent years, many companies have taken steps to help their employees quit smoking. Smoking cessation is one of the most cost-effective health care benefits available, so it's a win-win situation: Employers save money while employees improve their health. And, because cigarettes are so expensive, employees who quit will save money, too.

"Only 5 percent of smokers are successful in stopping tobacco use unaided. That means 95 percent of people need some kind of assistance. Employers have to think of tobacco use as an addiction rather than as a bad habit," said Ron Finch, EdD, vice president at the

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the following actions for a comprehensive smoking cessation benefit:

- Cover at least four counseling sessions of at least 30 minutes each, including telephone, group and individual counseling sessions.
- Cover all FDA-approved nicotine replacement products and tobacco cessation medications.
- Provide counseling and medication coverage or at least two cessation attempts per year.
- Eliminate or minimize co-pays or deductibles for counseling and medications.



National Business Group on Health. "Smoking cessation is one of the most effective preventive services that employers can provide and should be covered in health plans as well as part of health promotion programs."

A workplace quit-smoking plan may be part of a larger employee wellness program or it may stand on its own. The plan should also include counseling sessions where "coaches" talk about different ways to quit smoking, including teaching employees how to manage the urge to smoke. These sessions can be in person or by phone. The plan also may include access to prescription and over-the-counter medications that help

people quit. Smoke-free workplaces protect employees from secondhand smoke and help people quit for good.

One challenge for employees is that they may not know the services available to them. In a survey from the National Business Group on Health, more than one-quarter of employees were unsure if their employers offered smoking cessation benefits. Of those who knew their companies did offer benefits, 25 percent didn't know what the benefits were.

If you smoke and would like your employer to help you quit, here are some tips to help you begin this effort:

• **Begin the conversation with your doctor.** Find out what your doctor recommends regarding cessation medications. For more information on how to quit and setting up a personalized quit plan, go to mytimetoquit.com.

• **Ask HR about existing programs and policies.** Your company may offer benefits that you don't know about or are not signed up for.

• **Request benefits.** Your company may be willing to help if the demand is there. Let your employer know that its workforce is ready to quit smoking and would benefit from a companywide effort.

This information is courtesy of Pfizer Inc.