

Research Supports the Effectiveness of Medical Nutrition Therapy in Employee Health Care

Evidence that medical nutrition therapy (MNT) is effective continues to mount. In 1999, the Institute of Medicine/National Academy of Science (NAS/IOM) report on MNT demonstrated significant savings for Medicare if MNT were to be offered to patients. The IOM/NAS report recommended that Medicare begin reimbursement of MNT for patients when the therapy is prescribed by a physician and performed by a Registered Dietitian. The report further states that the Registered Dietitian is the single identifiable group of health care professionals with standardized education, clinical training, continuing education, and national credentialing requirements necessary to be reimbursed by Medicare. The IOM/NAS study estimated that expanded coverage of MNT is likely to generate economically significant benefits to Medicare beneficiaries and to the Medicare program itself through reduced healthcare expenditure.

The Lewin Group, a highly respected health policies research firm, demonstrated similar savings and benefits in an independent study of MNT. The Lewin Group showed that MNT is associated with a substantial reduction in health care spending for inpatient and outpatient services for persons with diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and/or renal disease. The report further states that the cost of medical nutrition therapy would be more than offset by reductions in health care spending for these same diseases. This study found that that when MNT was incorporated with cardiovascular disease patients, hospitalizations costs were reduced by 8.6% and physician visits costs were reduced by 16.9%. The Lewin study also demonstrated that for diabetes mellitus, hospitalization costs were reduced by 9.5% and physician visits were reduced by 23.5%. Employer sponsorship of medical nutrition therapy could produce the same cost savings for the employees at your organization.

Based on results from the Lewin study mentioned above, calculate the return on investment for your organization:

The following equations can provide an idea of your cost savings using your data!

Claims for hospitalizations for CVD: _____ X 8.6% = _____ Estimated Savings

Claims for M.D. visits for CVD: _____ X 16.9% = _____ Estimated Savings

Claims for hospitalizations for DM: _____ X 9.5% = _____ Estimated Savings

Claims for M.D. visits for DM: _____ X 23.5% = _____ Estimated Savings

What are your medication, hospitalization and physician visit expenses for cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes and renal disease? Figure the savings for not only your employees, but also your entire insured population including retirees and employees dependents.

A December 1999 article in the Journal of the American Medical Association discussed the relationship between several modifiable health risks, including diet/obesity, and short-term health care charges. The authors concluded "health payers seeking to minimize health care charges may wish to consider strategic investments in interventions that effectively modify adverse health risks". This study found that for each increase in body mass index (BMI) there was an increase in health care costs. Body mass index is a measure of a persons level of adiposity, determined by weight (kg)/height (m²).

Pfizer Corporation demonstrated positive results utilizing medical nutrition therapy for their employee population afflicted with cardiovascular disease (CVD). A review of claims in 1997 showed that CVD was a leading cause of morbidity in the Pfizer employee population. A pilot lipid intervention program was administered in the Pfizer New York location. Employees with abnormal lipid levels were individually contacted by telephone and offered interventions free of charge. This intervention included a dietary component consisting of five sessions of one-on-one, in-person medical nutrition therapy with a registered dietitian that lasted 45 minutes in length over a 2-month

period. A similar exercise and physical activity intervention component was also incorporated into the lipid management program.

Pfizer discovered that this type of intervention would save them \$728,722 annually if offered to the entire Pfizer population. And, this was for just one of many disease diagnoses that MNT has shown tremendous effectiveness, both in return on investment and outcomes effectiveness.

First Chicago Corporation also found as body mass index (BMI) increases, the number of sick days, medical claims, and health care costs for individuals also increases, according to a survey of 3,066 First Chicago Corporation employees. First Chicago found that indirect and direct costs to employers rise with an increase in BMI within the employee population and that employers may obtain significant benefits from helping their workers achieve healthier weights.

For more information, go to: http://www.eatright.org/Public/GovernmentAffairs/83_mnt031901.cfm