

INTRODUCTION

Policy Forum: *Worksite Health Promotion and Wellness*

Ever since the United States Department of Health and Human Services initiated the decennial publication of the *Healthy People* goals for the nation, which began under the Administration of President Carter, ways have been sought to advance the cause of national health improvement through initiatives that would couple a concern for health and health improvement with some of the everyday functional activities of the American people. For the health of children, the schools have been an important venue for a variety of health promotion program initiatives. For working-age adults, the workplace has figured as an important target of opportunity for addressing the fundamental health issues of our population, from disease screening to immunizations to chronic disease self-management to lifestyle modification and health risk factor reduction. With huge proportions of employees spending at least 40 hours per week in one or more occupational settings and consuming a third of their meals during their time at-work, program initiatives that focus on stimulating healthy lifestyle changes can not only improve the prospects of long-term health outcomes, but significantly impact the healthcare cost obligations of the employing organization as well.

In this issue of the *North Carolina Medical Journal*, we have chosen to focus our attention on the potential these types of initiatives may have for businesses and industries, the reasons why some companies have seen benefit in making such investments, why it may not be so easy to establish (or quantify) the “return on investment” (or ROI) that can provide the rationale for these investments, and the kinds of incentives necessary to assure adequate levels of employee participation in such programs when they are offered at the workplace.

We have invited a distinguished group of North Carolinians and national figures in the health promotion field to address these issues, and we are fortunate that so many accepted our invitation. Following an extensive Issue Brief on critical issues in this field by Dr. Joyce M. Young, the person responsible for health promotion and wellness activities in the United States for IBM Corporation, each author offers a particular set of observations on the way this movement in American business has developed. We are also pleased that Dr. Alexandra Farrow, a friend and colleague of many years who studies these issues in the United Kingdom and Western Europe offers her own view of how these same issues have been faced on the other side of the Atlantic.

North Carolina has a number of large, national (or international) corporations with the capacities to provide impressive and effective health promotion programs for their employees at the workplace. But, our state is characterized by having one of the largest proportions of small companies, many of which could never afford to offer such services to their employees. Many cannot even afford to offer healthcare insurance. Hence, a consideration of the value and potential of workplace-based health promotion efforts is a matter of seemingly less importance to North Carolina health policy deliberations than would be the case in other states. This is why our readers need to give serious attention to the commentaries in this issue of the *Journal*. In these pages, one can discover not only the argument in support of workplace-based health promotion programs, but options for small businesses to consider if they wish to leverage local community resources and programs in support of the health promotion interests and needs of their employees. The health of all North Carolinians is at stake.

A Personal Editorial Note:

With this issue, the 30th under our editorship, we conclude our stewardship of the *North Carolina Medical Journal* in its new format, a venture we began in January 2002. We want to express our deep appreciation to the hundreds of authors, reviewers, Editorial Board members, and our colleagues at the North Carolina Institute of Medicine and The Duke Endowment who have given us this opportunity to engage the leading policy makers, healthcare professionals, and the lay public in lively information exchange and debate on important matters for the health of North Carolinians and our nation as a whole. We welcome Dr. Thomas C. Ricketts III as the Journal's new Editor-in-Chief and wish him and his colleagues the very best as they continue this important work. Having a person of his national reputation and ability accept this responsibility is itself a testimonial to the quality of what this Journal has set out to achieve.

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