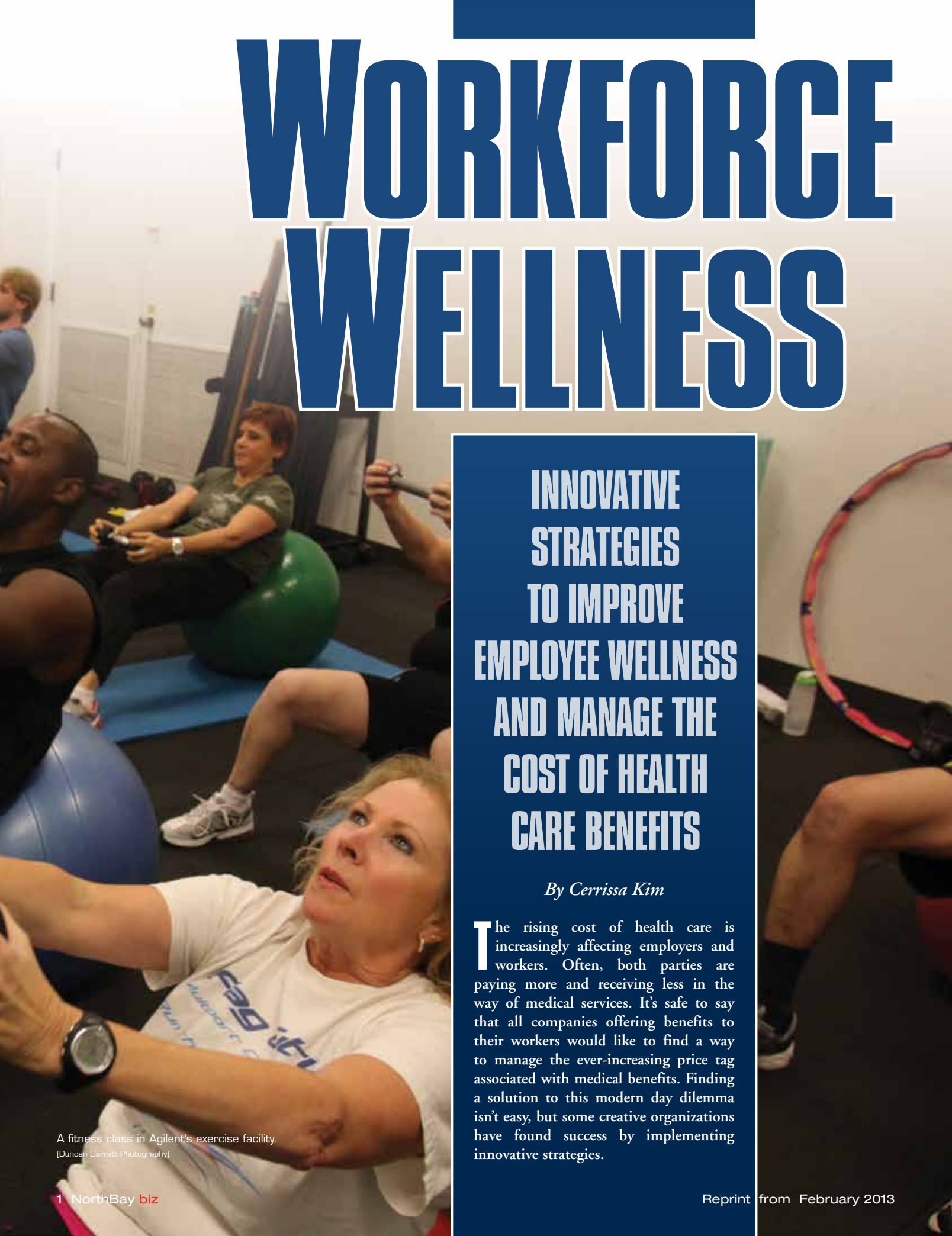


WORKFORCE WELLNESS



INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE EMPLOYEE WELLNESS AND MANAGE THE COST OF HEALTH CARE BENEFITS

By Cerrissa Kim

The rising cost of health care is increasingly affecting employers and workers. Often, both parties are paying more and receiving less in the way of medical services. It's safe to say that all companies offering benefits to their workers would like to find a way to manage the ever-increasing price tag associated with medical benefits. Finding a solution to this modern day dilemma isn't easy, but some creative organizations have found success by implementing innovative strategies.

A fitness class in Agilent's exercise facility.
[Duncan Garrett Photography]

Agilent Technologies, Inc.

Agilent's headquarters for its Electronic Measurement Group (EMG) is situated on a 195-acre site in the rolling hills of Santa Rosa. Working at this location are engineers, researchers, field sales people, production staff, marketing, business and finance professionals.

Tricia Burt, environmental health and safety manager for the Americas, proudly points to a large aerial photograph of the campus that hangs in the hall of the main entrance building. There are soccer and softball fields, a one-mile par course, walking trails, fruit and vegetable gardens and even a K-3 elementary school. "All these amenities help our employees have a positive work/life balance," she says.

One well-known aspect of staying healthy is exercise. It's been shown that ease and accessibility of a gym makes a big difference in whether or not a person will participate in fitness activities. As part of the solution, Agilent offers employees access to an onsite gym, complete with showers and locker facilities. It also offers a wide range of group exercise classes such as Tai Chi, yoga, Zumba, pilates and more. Since so much of the work at Agilent is done at a desk, employees are encouraged to take time during their day to participate in classes or use one of the many walking trails to get up and move.

The campus has offered fitness classes for more than 15 years, but they were enhanced in 2008 when a major building renovation took place. New workspaces were designed to help spark creativity and the fitness offerings were increased. Since the inception of the newly structured



Tricia Burt, Agilent's environmental health and safety manager for the Americas, along the company's par course. [Duncan Garrett Photography]

fitness program, participation has increased and classes are very well attended. "Our fitness and wellness programs enhance our employee experience," says Burt, who participates regularly in classes.

With a workforce of approximately 1,200 people in Santa Rosa (20,500 worldwide) there are many employees whose paths would never cross if it weren't for the gym. "You meet people from different departments that you might otherwise never know," says Irene Calzada-Bickham, who works in Agilent's Santa Rosa-headquartered Microwave and Communications Division. Getting into shape and staying there is a common struggle for both executives and line workers. "There's a camaraderie that's developed between the people who participate in the classes. They encourage one another and cheer

each other on," says Burt.

Mike Burns, an IT engineer, exemplifies the success of participating in the Agilent's offerings. He started a year and a half ago with what he calls "light stuff": Yoga and walking and gradually segued into Zumba and running. He recently completed a 50k run and has lost more than 80 pounds. Although the running group he belongs to isn't officially sponsored by Agilent, many of the runners are coworkers who met one another through the gym and exercise classes. Having a free onsite gym has benefited some workers financially too, enabling them to give up their private gym memberships and saving them hundreds of dollars per year.

Another key aspect of the health and wellness program is injury prevention. Agilent contracts with Bureau Veritas North America, Inc., a health, safety and environmental services company with employees who work onsite at the Santa Rosa Agilent campus.

Sky Pile, Joe Bootier and Debbie DeCarli are ergonomists and personal fitness trainers employed by the bureau who oversee the fitness and wellness program, meeting individually with employees who need injury prevention attention. Conducting ergonomic evaluations and working with employees to address their immediate needs sometimes leads to the development of a personal fitness program that will help prevent future damage. Debbie DeCarli of Bureau Veritas also oversees the program and manages a fitness library with hundreds



Agilent employees Sam Freeman and Susan Berg enjoy the company's garden. [Duncan Garrett Photography]

of DVDs, that are available for employees to check out at no cost, and coordinates an annual blood drive and flu shot clinic, all onsite.

having to work later in life to afford retirement. With 25 percent of the county's current workforce likely to retire in four to five years, Adams (a

getting people up and moving would be a good start to addressing the three indicators that were chosen.

Joanne Peterson, director of human

These days, fresh fruit, yogurt and nuts are commonly seen at office celebrations.

"It's really important to us that we're doing all we can to provide as much as possible for employees and to continually improve what we have in place," says Burt. "We believe our program benefits our bottom line, but it also improves morale." Burt's membership in the Sonoma County Wellness Committee brings Agilent's commitment to health and wellness beyond the corridors of its facilities and out into the community. Committee members meet regularly to share best practices and learn from one another. The committee includes a host of well-known employers including Straus Family Creamery, Medtronic, Becoming Independent, Amy's Kitchen and Alvarado Street Bakery, just to name a few. The common denominating factor for all of these employers is they're all devoted to finding ways to improve the health and well being of their employees.

Aging Workforce

One of the reasons the county of Marin wants to improve the health of its employees is because the average age of its workers is 49 years. Aging increases the risk for a host of problems for many people, such as adult onset Type II diabetes, cardiovascular disease and obesity. This is especially true for individuals who aren't engaged in a healthy lifestyle. As a government entity, the county of Marin continues to provide benefits for its retirees, and an overall healthier population means lower health care costs in the short and the long run for the county.

The new health and wellness program started with strong direction from Supervisor Susan Adams, representing district one on the county Board of Supervisors. County workers, like the rest of the population, are

registered nurse) knew it was important to help employees become and stay as healthy as possible. With more than 80 percent of employees using Kaiser Permanente as their health care



Tod Carr was the county of Marin employee Wellness Champion in October 2012.

provider, the county approached KP to see what it could offer. Kaiser compiled the county's basic health indicators and agreed that a wellness program would be a good thing for the county to implement.

Since the start of the program in February 2011, small improvements in employee health indicators have proven the approach is working. The county decided to start with three of the top five health risk factors Kaiser indicated were common among its members nationwide. The county focused on obesity/weight management, depression and high blood pressure. (Smoking and the frequency with which people have health screening tests like mammograms and colonoscopies are the other two top indicators Kaiser has identified as risk factors to optimal health.) Program designers felt that just

resources for the county of Marin, says the county's strong partnership with Kaiser has been a key component of the program's success. "Kaiser already had information available and has worked with us to disseminate regular communication to our employees," says Peterson. Electronic distribution of wellness program information has proven to be an easy way to maintain regular communication. Special materials provide workers with tips on how to "maintain don't gain" during the holidays, and a special Web-based program has taught people how to make better nutritional decisions. Kaiser has also brought special services to county offices. One informational seminar that was brought on campus taught people to understand what their numbers really mean when it came to interpreting results of their blood pressure, glucose and cholesterol tests.

Not everyone can make it to the county offices though. With a workforce that spans accountants to firefighters, the county wanted its program to contain a home grown component. Each department was asked to name a wellness ambassador who serves as an embedded wellness champion within their sector and helps motivate peers to get healthy. Since all departments regularly conduct staff meetings, the wellness ambassadors have been finding ways to incorporate healthy behaviors and wellness education into the meetings. Some ambassadors have made chair massages available (for a fee paid by the employee), while others have provided healthy cooking classes. "The intent is to customize the approach to the culture of each department," says Peterson.

There have also been tours of the Thursday farmers market (the one

that takes place right across the street from the county's main offices in San Rafael), where guides walk employees through the open-air stalls and educate them on how to incorporate fruits and vegetables from the market into their home menus.

One of the institutionalized benefits the county has seen is a shift toward healthier foods used to celebrate

“This kind of benefit is something we can give our employees that they can really use.”

—Rachel Berliner, Amy's Kitchen

special occasions such as birthdays.

“Overall, you'll see healthier items at work-sponsored events,” says Peterson. Instead of always having soft drinks, cake and cookies to honor birthdays, people have become more conscious about their food choices. These days, fresh fruit, yogurt and nuts are commonly seen at office celebrations. The health and human services department took the lead in improving vending machine selections, which now offer healthy choices as a compliment to what was offered before, and many campuses are now smoke-free.

Everyone likes the friendly competition that's evolved as a result of Kaiser's grant to the county that lets employees participate in “Thrive Across America,” Kaiser's voluntary online physical fitness program. Thrive Across America lets participants travel through all eight Kaiser Permanente regions and program offices by recording exercise minutes as they move along a virtual trail from west to east. More than 800 Marin County employees participated in the program in teams of four to eight people. Over a 10 week period, the various teams did more than a combined 100 days of exercise. One high achieving team from the child support office walked the lagoon together as a walking club and lost

more than 150 pounds collectively. “With the recent economy, layoffs and salary freezes, this program is something positive we can offer,” says Peterson.

She says about once a month, she gets a call from a business that's interested in implementing a wellness program for its employees and wants to know more about the county's program. “It's about inspiring other organizations, too,” says Peterson. Since the county's employees are government workers and medical benefits extend into retirement, there's a good business case for expanding the wellness program to include retired workers, something the county may be looking into for the future.

Primary care at the office

Amy's Kitchen has grown from a small, mom-and-pop operation to an international supplier of healthy frozen foods. In 2008, the company's revenues were flat, but every year since, it's experienced growth, even in this turbulent economy. As it's expanded, owners Andy and Rachel Berliner continue to make their employees' health and welfare a top priority.

A few years ago, the company was experiencing the same kinds of challenges other business were dealing with in regard to rising employee health care costs. When the company's Kaiser premiums rose dramatically, executive leadership at Amy's Kitchen found they'd have to pay more money for less coverage and would essentially have to take benefits away from their employees.

The company started researching ways to improve the health care it could offer to its employees, while lowering its company's benefits costs at the same time. Amy's Kitchen found businesses across the country that were offering primary health care to their employees, through a third party, private company clinic. These employers were able to control their health benefit costs while providing employees with convenient access to medical care—all at a reduced cost. Amy's leadership staff members



Andy and Rachel Berliner are owners of Amy's Kitchen, which has a private company health clinic.

visited many of the companies and their clinic sites and became excited about implementing its own health management and maintenance program.

The Berliners, who are passionate about the natural and organic convenience food they sell, thought opening a quality health care facility where employees could better access care was a good alignment with their company's healthy living values. “This kind of benefit is something we can give our employees that they can really use,” says Rachel.

Clinics opened in Oregon and Santa Rosa in January 2011 and became immediately available to employees and their family members, even if family members weren't insured. With a \$5 co-pay and convenient access (in Santa Rosa, Amy's Family Health Center is a five-minute walk from the plant; in Oregon, it's actually on campus) the clinics were an immediate hit.

Every appointment with the doctor runs a minimum of 30 minutes and is usually closer to an hour if the employee is having a physical or has an appointment relating to chronic disease management. There's follow-up and discussion about what the patient needs to stay healthy, and much of the work centers around prevention. The clinic is collecting baseline data and plans to use the aggregate data to help

focus prevention efforts that include education, training and support groups in areas where the population needs it most.

“A healthy population is less costly and has a better quality of life,” says Cindy Gillespie, director of human resources. Workers had indicated that taking time off work to see a doctor was a barrier to care; in addition, with 80 percent of their workforce speaking Spanish, Amy’s employees often encountered a communication barrier when seeking medical care. Many women employees often skipped routine preventive procedures such as mammograms and ob/gyn care.

Amy’s Family Health Center is run by **QuadMed**, a corporation that operates company clinics throughout the United States. “The clinics have become a great retention and attraction tool for employers,” says Tom Grass, general manager of the west region for **QuadMed**. Grass says that the clinics have outstanding patient satisfaction scores averaging 4.5 or higher out of a total possible score of 5. He attributes part of the success to the quality doctors **QuadMed** hires. The clinic has an open access calendar and it’s easy for workers to get an appointment on the same day when needed. “There’s a significant reduction in the amount of emergency room and urgent care use, which is crucial, because both are expensive ways to provide health care,” says Grass.

Bruce Heller, MD, the physician for Amy’s clinic, says, “This model is an atypical practice environment,” but one that, he finds, works quite well for him and his patients. Heller, who’s fluent in Spanish, says he has time during his appointments to thoroughly answer his patients’ questions and interact with them. But it goes beyond just medical care. “Caring for the patients here is like caring for an extended family. They’re all part of the Amy’s community. There’s a different feel providing services for a connected group.”

Heller says his own stress level has gone down because he can spend

quality time with each patient. As his patients learn to trust him, they’re more likely to listen to his suggestions for prevention and chronic disease management. In 2011, employees were given a choice to pay a higher rate for Kaiser or choose the company’s Blue Cross self-funded PPO (Kaiser patients can also use the health center). Initially, only about 40 percent of enrollees switched to the clinic, but it’s anticipated more will sign up for it during the next open enrollment. “We might also be providing some relief to the public health system by providing care for uninsured family members, who’d otherwise be seeking care through other means,” says Gillespie, who notes the county of Sonoma has noticed the program too.

“We’re so pleased that our early vision for the Amy’s Family Health Centers is being realized. Our employees and their families have easy and affordable access to health care. Our doctors and nurses are well-trained, compassionate and fluent in Spanish, which is very important to many of our employees and their families. They provide excellent care and additional support to help our employees navigate the Amy’s PPO plans when necessary,” says Andy. “Our employees say we’re changing their lives. That says it all,” says Rachel.

Good business sense

In a YouTube video made by the county of Marin to promote its program with Kaiser, Marin County Board of Supervisors President Susan



Bruce Heller, MD, is the physician for Amy’s Kitchen Family Health Center.

Adams sums up the importance of its health and wellness program by saying, “It’s about living your best life, in the best way, and getting the most years out of that life with healthy, productive living.”

Workforce wellness can improve a business’ bottom line, but it’s not just about cost savings. It’s also about employers providing individuals with tools that will enable them to enhance the quality and length of their lives. It’s a symbiotic partnership that works for everyone involved. ■

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