

CPH News and Views

A semi-monthly column on emerging topics related to healthy workplaces

Issue # 25: A national program for worksite health

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Most adults spend almost 1/3 of their time in the workplace. Workplaces are therefore critical both as environments that can contribute to health or illness as well as convenient locations to reach adult populations for health education, health promotion, screening, and job health interventions. Workplaces impact worker health while at work (due to ergonomic risk factors, job stress, or food or activity options) as well as after work (such as having enough energy for leisure activities).

The new federal Affordable Care Act (ACA) contains numerous provisions to encourage prevention and improved management of chronic disease, including worksite initiatives. The Center for the Promotion of Health in the England Workplace (CPH-NEW) is partnering with Viridian Health Management (<http://www.viridianhealth.com>) and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to help implement the “National Healthy Worksite Program.” This \$8 million effort features development of a best practices model for worksite health at up to 100 companies located in 7 program site locations across the nation.

The project has three primary goals:

- Reduce the risk of chronic disease among employees and their families through evidence-based workplace health interventions and promising practices
- Promote sustainable and replicable workplace health activities
- Promote peer-to-peer healthy business mentoring

The project will develop and implement health and organizational assessments and evaluation tools to identify personal and workplace health risks. These will be used to guide evidence-based interventions on both the individual and company levels to promote health, control chronic diseases, and reduce worker health and safety risks. The goal is to use CDC resources to develop public-domain tools that can be used by employers, labor organizations, insurers, benefits organizations and companies and the public sector to implement sustainable worksite health promotion programs for small and medium-sized employers. There will be extensive evaluation to capture barriers and contributors to program success to help guide employers to the most effective approaches. Most, if not all, of the tools developed under the project will be in the public domain so that they can be available to all organizations interested in improving worker health.

CPH-NEW has several important roles in this project. One is to manage a data center that will conduct analyses at the company level and at the individual level (with de-identified data) to assess interventions on more than 10,000 expected participants. This will require developing, with the Viridian team, clear and relevant summary variables that can be quickly fed back to both individuals and companies, allowing for improvements at both levels.

Another key function is to provide expertise to health coaches, employers, and workplace health champions on the assessment of job health and safety risks and exploring possible interventions that integrate health promotion initiatives with safety initiatives. In

addition, the project will utilize the employee survey from the CPH-NEW 'Research-to-Practice Toolkit' to assess workplace risks and environmental resources in relation to ergonomics, job stress, and safety culture.

Major features include structuring interventions on ergonomics and work organization through other components of the CPH-New 'Toolkit' and training Regional Program Directors and workplace champions in an integrated approach to workplace interventions. Integration of health promotion and health protection (occupational health and safety) can, for example, lead to distinguishing between workers in physically active jobs and passive, sedentary jobs in terms of recommending specific types of leisure-time physical activity. Control of stress-related issues might include both teaching relaxation techniques and reducing sources of stress. Both Viridian and CDC have been enthusiastic about integrating worker health and safety into worksite health promotion, and about integrating worksite environmental changes to encourage both health promotion and protection. The combination of worksite changes with individual worker changes is likely to provide both larger improvements as well as a sustainable model.

In the New England region, CPH-NEW plans a special emphasis program designed to engage directly line-level employees in the workplace intervention planning and implementation efforts. This work is adapted from the CPH-NEW Research-to-Practice initiatives and based at the UConn Health Center under the direction of Dr. Martin Cherniack.

Those interested in the project can find more information at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/nationalhealthyworksite>.

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