



## Firms need to adjust health care culture, experts say

By Chris Silva  
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It's no secret the U.S. health care system is floundering. The United States is trailing dozens of other nations in terms of health care outcomes while spending the most on medical services. Employers can help reverse the problem by changing their corporate culture and promoting health and wellness in the workplace, policy experts contend.

"If you look at the economic structure, it's all dependent on someone entering the system [by becoming sick]," Michael Samuelson, president of the Health & Wellness Institute told attendees at a Web seminar on Thursday, hosted by America's Health Insurance Plans.

The country needs to shift "from sick-care to well-care... from sickness to wellness. We have a sick-care system, and clearly the system isn't working," he added.

Health care costs are soaring due to unhealthy lifestyles, a growing uninsured population and a rise in treated disease prevalence, among other issues, he noted.

Employers can teach the importance of wellness and prevention by encouraging healthy behaviors with rewards (including cash, days off, clothing or other merchandise) for employees who reach healthy benchmarks. Alternatively, employers can set lower copays and lower deductibles for employees who regularly take a health risk assessment or a physical exam. In addition, employers can make food selections in their cafeterias healthier, provide gym membership discounts and make stairwells more attractive to encourage the use of stairs.

"There's one health care road, and if you drive a semi, God bless you, but you should be charged a higher surcharge compared to the folks who drive the Volkswagens," Samuelson remarked.

Healthy behavior starts from the top; therefore, it's critical that senior management display their own healthy habits if they hope to instill change in the workforce, Samuelson said.

According to a ranking of health systems by the World Health Organization, the United States ranks 37th, behind France, Italy, Austria, Morocco and Chile.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the United States is projected to spend approximately \$2.3 trillion on health care services this year. What's more, it's projected the nation will spend \$2.9 trillion by 2009 and up to \$4 trillion by 2015.