



During his speech, Frank had the audience hold hands, making the point that, though we are in different organizations, we need to work together to ensure the ongoing and future success of workplace ergonomics.

“MSDs, Preventive Health and You: A Three Part Endeavor”

Part II: Preventive Health—Around the Nation and in the Office

-Jessie Hochhalter and Rick Spencer,
Omega Health Systems

Can preventive healthcare simultaneously improve the wellness of Americans *and* reduce costs? Opponents of preventive healthcare spending point out the difficulty of quantifying overall savings. But with chronic conditions being the leading cause of death worldwide, spanning all regions and socioeconomic levels—and steadily accelerating—preventive healthcare is hard to ignore. According to the World Health Organization, noncommunicable diseases account for more than 75 percent of deaths in the United States and more than 80 percent in Europe.¹

In the previous installment, we discussed a particular chronic condition: musculoskeletal disorders, or MSDs. We explored the heavy costs and complications that can arise from very preventable causes.

See “MSDs,” page 3

“Keynote,” cont.

Here is what some attendees had to say:

“I found it useful, informative and thoroughly entertaining. His personalizing the information with his own experiences, and the insights into some of the iconic folk that he has worked with made the presentation even more entertaining. I particularly enjoyed the homilies he used to identify his points, it gave a very informal and personal feel to the presentation.”

*David M. Goldojarb, M.S.,
Disability Case Manager/Ergonomist
Pratt & Whitney Rocketdyne, Inc.*

“I enjoyed Mr. Maguire’s Keynote Speech very much. It was by far the best keynote speech I have heard at NECE in all my years of attendance. I felt like he was speaking directly to me and felt moved and empowered by his stories. I am an eagle and I will fly like an eagle....”

*Naz Dardashti, CPE
Certified Professional Ergonomist
ERGONAZ, INC.*

“Frank Maguire’s Keynote address at the 2009 National Ergonomics Conference & Expo was the best yet! Mr. Maguire’s message was both motivational and inspirational, touching the heart as well as the mind. I came away with simple and specific tools to use to improve my communication and listening skills, and the excitement to apply them. Many thanks!”

*Robin Cyr
Occupational Health Manager
S.M. Stoller Corp.*

“MSDs” cont. from pg. 2

Now, we will look at exactly how powerful the U.S. government believes preventive health can be in combating ever-increasing healthcare costs and enhancing the well-being of Americans, and how this paradigm shift is applicable, and necessary, in the workplace.

What we must face is that throwing time, money and energy at the acute manifestations of a much larger problem is backward and illogical. We don't wait until our engine blows out before we see a mechanic; why do we resist seeing the same potential for health when prevention of something devastating down the road is a matter of simple maintenance?

Opponents of preventive health will argue that change will not happen fast enough; they'll note that we will spend billions on healthcare screenings, education and other preventive measures only to have people living longer with the same chronic conditions. While it may be true that change can't happen overnight, our current “deal with it as it comes” approach to healthcare is simply not sustainable. The U.S. spends more per capita on healthcare than any other country yet continues to rank 37th in the world in terms of healthcare quality (according to the World Health Organization). This must mean that we are not using our resources effectively.

Ergonomics is one of the most important and overlooked tools regarding preventive health. The average working American spends about 40 hours per week sitting at a desk; that is nearly 25 percent of our lives during those years!

Simple changes and small investments in the health of your workforce will mean better health, increased productivity and fewer costs later. Although it may seem hard to justify spending any more money within your organization in the current economic climate, preventive health is not only better for your employee, it is better for your bottom line. Don't believe it? Let's look at how the current administration plans on getting out of the vicious cycle of ever-increasing healthcare costs.

In the next 12 months, under the Recovery Act, the government has allocated billions of dollars to healthcare (approximately 64 percent of the total Recovery Act budget for 2009). These funds will be

used for healthcare infrastructure, health information technology and other programs in order to make the system run more smoothly and reduce costs in the long term. In fact, \$1 billion will be used specifically for prevention and wellness programs to improve the general health of the American people and reduce the enormous costs associated with reactive healthcare.²

By 2012, this spending will decrease to a mere 1 percent of the total Recovery Act budget. Why is the government spending so much money on preventive healthcare and infrastructure *now*? The Congressional Budget Office estimates that by 2025, if we continue with the current healthcare system and reactive health paradigm, one out of every four dollars in our national economy will be tied up in the health system³.

Simply put, we need reform, and the current administration has vowed to make investment in wellness and prevention an integral part of this reform. Human resources professionals, take note.

Many chronic and costly conditions have preventable causes; this has been a hot topic in dealing with obesity, heart disease, cancer and diabetes. This also is the case with musculoskeletal disorders; these long-term injuries are preventable through small changes in equipment, behavior and education. It is time for a paradigm shift. Health isn't something that should be “dealt with” when something goes wrong. ... It is something that needs to be promoted, enhanced and protected.

In the next installment of “MSDs, Preventive Health and You,” we will discuss how you can embrace the preventive health ideology to combat MSDs, increase productivity, reduce costs and protect your most valuable asset—your health.

¹ http://www.wpro.who.int/NR/rdonlyres/DF245E6E-7CAF-44D5-9BAE-6E65C9741F8F/0/People_centred_SIN_May2008.pdf

² <http://www.recovery.gov>

³ http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/health_care