Pilot Project Aims to Help Employees Prevent Serious Illnesses

What if you could get a glimpse of your life 10, 20, 30 years from now and then use that information to alter your future for the better?

That’s what a new pilot project known as the Wellness Program aims to do, says Malva Daniel Reid, senior director, Health Service.

The voluntary program grew out of discussions between union and management leaders on the Joint Medical Administration Committee. The program is expected to be tested at major locations nationwide, starting with sites in Delaware in April.

The goal is to help employees improve their health by arming them with information about their current health status, pointing out areas of potential concern in the future, and then providing guidance for how to avoid a major health crisis.

Reid says many illnesses, such as diabetes, heart disease and stroke, can be predicted and hopefully then prevented — or at least treated early before they become more serious.

To participate, employees will fill out a health-assessment survey and then go through a basic “biometrics” medical screening that includes a blood-pressure check, height and weight check and a finger-prick blood test.

Employees who participate are encouraged to then share the information generated from the initial screening with their primary-care doctor and to get an annual check up.

“Amtrak pays for nearly all of the cost of wellness care, but too many of us are letting that benefit go to waste by rarely using it,” says Robert Lynch, principal officer, Employee Benefits. “Our data shows that as a company, we’re below the national average for seeking out preventative care.”

Adds Reid: “Why wait until you’re sick and a problem becomes hard or impossible to reverse. Why do that to your spouse or girlfriend or boyfriend or children? Now is the time to start building a relationship with your doctor so that you can enjoy life with the people you love for years and years to come.”

Employees in the program can tap into nutrition and exercise information tailored to various risk factors or illnesses, and use it to make informed choices about their health.

“This is all about you,” says Reid, “about giving you the information you need to be your own health advocate.”

Human Resources Offers Help in Time of Grief

Losing a loved one is always painful. The Human Resources department hopes to do all it can to help family members of employees or retirees who pass away by streamlining its survivor benefits process.

“The death of a loved one is a very difficult experience,” says Robert Lynch, principal officer, Employee Benefits. “It is at this time that we must be of service to our employees by providing information about such items as life insurance, continuing medical coverage, obtaining the final paycheck, continuing rail pass privileges and retirement benefits.”

Under the updated process, survivors now receive a comprehensive letter describing all of the benefits available to them and the name and phone number of a specific benefits representative whom they can contact if they have questions or need help. The letters are mailed out within 10 business days from when the company receives notice of a death.

Previously, various Amtrak departments communicated information about the various benefits, which was sometimes overwhelming to family members.

Melissa Alleman assisted in bringing about the new process after her husband, Steve — a former general superintendent and Transportation and Engineering employee with more than 30 years of service — died last May. Mrs. Alleman’s feedback from her perspective as a widow brought to light improvements to the process.

Jed Dodd, general chairman of the Brotherhood of Maintenance Way Employees (BMWE), also helped shape the new approach.

Lynch stresses that, while it’s not a pleasant thought, all employees should make sure their beneficiary elections for life insurance and 401(k) investment plans are up-to-date.

Employees can review and update their beneficiary designation for life insurance by logging into AmtrakBenefits.com or calling 800-481-4887. For the 401(k) Plan, employees can complete a beneficiary designation form online at www.netbenefits.com or they can obtain a copy of the form by contacting Fidelity at 1-877-477-2685.