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Wisconsin

Employees need to bone up on health insurance needs

Collaborative for Healthcare Quality on source of unbiased info

By Pete Bach, Post-Crescent Staff Writer
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With the annual open enrollment period opening this week in many workplaces, workers and health consumers need all the good information they can get.

The place to start is with employers, who usually conduct information sessions to air any plan changes. But another evolving tool for Wisconsin employees is the Wisconsin Collaborative for Healthcare Quality (WCHQ), a nonprofit consortium of health care systems, hospitals and physician practices.

Transparency in health care is in the forefront of many Americans' minds as the government health care reform heads for the U.S. Senate having passed in the House late Saturday.

Senate leaders said the reform would be dead on arrival on their side of the aisle, given that the government health insurance plan or so-called public plan included in the House version is unacceptable to a few Democratic moderates who hold the balance of power.

That being said, the Wisconsin collaborative affords employers and employees a chance to compare the performance of health systems, hospitals and physician groups on price and some medical outcomes.

"We're going to build in a little more explanation into our Web site," said Kathy Werner, director of performance measurement for the collaborative. "I'd be the first to tell you it's not the friendliest Web site for consumers. It tends to be more biased toward providers. It's hard to be both. There will be continued work to make some components of that more user friendly."

Werner said the WCHQ came out with updated measures in keeping with National Diabetes Awareness Month.

The Diabetes All-or-None measure has three goals and was chosen because of the benefits it provides to both patient and provider, she said.

Mary Felton, president of HR Business Partners, an independent human resources consultation in Appleton, tapped the WCHQ database to research health care when she formerly headed HR departments for large Fox Cities firms.

The WCHQ partnership has been around since 2003.

"Where do your employees live? You need to make sure there's clinics in the area," Felton said. "You want to look at quality of care.

"And what is the breadth of the expertise of the medical teams? What is the cost? And obviously a big one is can they take new patients?"

Felton said workplaces that make health risk assessments available on site, bring in a health coach or nurse practitioner often yield a healthier work environment at a more economical cost to the employer, particularly those who are self-insured.

Pete Bach: 920-993-1000, ext. 430, or pbach@postcrescent.com

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