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Volume 2; Issue 3
May 2006

QUOTE OF THE MONTH:

“The dictionary is the only place where success comes before work.”

-Arthur Brisbane

IN THIS ISSUE:



Hemorrhaging of Prescription Drug Costs

You've heard it on TV or read it in the newspapers. Blue chip American corporations have filed for or are on the verge bankruptcy. By Jeff Polter, VP 4D Pharmacy Management Systems [MORE...](#)

Gas prices fuel telecommuting

Every time Laurie Shannon makes the 160-mile round-trip drive between her home in Belchertown, Mass., and her office in suburban Boston, she uses five gallons of gas and shells out \$5.10 in tolls. With prices at the pump skyrocketing, she has devised a partial solution: fewer commutes. [MORE...](#)

Courtesy of The Christian Science Monitor

Refine Your Work Life Balance by Setting Healthy Boundaries

Setting healthy boundaries is essential for a healthy work life balance. That sounds true, but what does it mean? What do healthy boundaries look like, and how can you know where and how to set them? by Molly Gordon, MCC [MORE...](#)

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Who would have believed this news just a few years ago? Familiar names include:

- General Motors
- Delphi
- Northwest Airlines
- Ford Motor Company
- And many other large marquis names

There are many reasons which force businesses into bankruptcy. However these companies all have something in common; health benefits cost is the number one reason stated for their financial problems.

Large and small employers around the country are so stretched by health benefits costs, some are seriously contemplating eliminating health benefits for their employees.

Many factors make up health benefits costs and one of the fastest rising components is prescription drugs. A very hot topic is the Pharmacy Benefit Manager (PBM) industry. PBMs are enjoying record profits and stock valuation while their group customers are suffering from high prescription benefit costs.

This issue has caught the eye of Elliot Spitzer, New York State Attorney General. He is investigating the PBM industry due to the very large “spread” PBMs keep without the disclosing the practice to many of their employer customers.

What’s the “spread”? It’s the difference between what the PBM charges the employer and what the PBM reimburses the pharmacy. For example, a PBM may charge an employer \$20.00 for a prescription and then reimburse the pharmacy \$11.00, keeping the difference; this is referred to as the spread. The employer may not know what the pharmacy is reimbursed so they will not know how large of a spread is being kept by their PBM.

So what can an employer do to get true PBM costs and pharmacy reimbursement data?

Take a look at your PBM contract. Make sure it is fully

transparent and will “pass-through” to you the price it pays its retail and mail-order pharmacies. The wording should also require clear disclosure all revenues including manufacturer rebates, discounts, and fees.

If you’re not happy with the contract or your PBMs response, search for a PBM that operates transparently. Indicators of transparency are not marking up claims or keeping the “spread”. Find a PBM that will re-price your recent prescription claims with precise data on each drug, including cost, quantity and pharmacy utilized. And make sure that the PBM will continue to provide that kind of detailed transparent reporting.

To receive a prescription drug claims analysis or for more information about this topic, please contact Jeff Polter, Vice President Business Development for 4D Pharmacy Management Systems, Inc. at 1-800-241-5103 or jeff@4dpharmacy.com.



“If there’s nothing that requires face-to-face meetings, and if I have everything I need with me, I can work at home three days a week,” says Ms. Shannon, a research psychologist at WFD Consulting in Newton, Mass. With a laugh she adds, “My dogs like it, too.”

Shannon is in the vanguard of a quietly growing band of Americans turning to telecommuting to reduce gas costs. As they work at home, typically a day or two a week, they are spurring a shift that could eventually turn the United States into what workplace analyst John Challenger calls a “telecommuter nation.”

“Companies are just beginning to become aware that employees are coming to them here and there, asking for help,” says Mr. Challenger, CEO of Challenger, Gray & Christmas, an outplacement firm headquartered in Chicago. “They’re seeing more absences. It’s still under the radar, but as gas prices hit \$3 a gallon, it’s beginning to make a real impact on people’s decisions with their employer.”

Twenty-six million Americans work from home at least one day a month, and 22 million at least once a week, according to the International Telework Association and Council.

Even before the current round of price increases, Shannon telecommuted one day a week, then increased it to two. Describing the corporate culture at WFD that makes this possible, senior consultant Monica Roper says, “We’re super-flexible. Nobody even blinks an eyelash when somebody says, ‘I’m going to start working from home more frequently.’”

Not all employers are so amenable. “I’m finding that there’s more resistance than I would expect,” says Paul Kole, a telecommunications consultant in Cambridge, Mass. “Managers think there’s a loss of control, that workers are going to goof off. But often they work harder.”

Caty Kehs, a web designer in Silver Spring, Md., encountered that kind of resistance recently when she considered a job opportunity in suburban Virginia.

“I asked about telecommuting, but they said that didn’t seem feasible,” she says. “This employer wanted people to be on-site.” She turned down the offer. “It seemed better to wait for something that would be easier to commute to, or comes with a telecommuting option.” Mrs. Kehs says. “I refuse to sit in my car that long and waste that much money on gas.” She and her husband moved to Silver Spring because it is on the Metro line, making it easy to use mass transit.

Challenger traces some of the resistance to telecommuting to “a century of workplace habits that involve going into the office and having a supervisor who sits over our shoulder and makes sure we work.”

Calling that kind of monitoring outdated, he explains that companies now measure performance much more objectively, with performance-based pay and “metrics-based” measurements of performance.

For Shannon, working at home hardly means taking it easy. “The time I would have spent in the car I spend going through e-mail, organizing projects, and getting ready for the next day.”

In most cases, the employee initiates a request to telecommute. At Pitney Bowes, managers and employees work out the decision together, says Ed Houghton, director of workforce effectiveness. The worker writes a proposal, indicating how the job will be done. Considerations include such questions as: How often will telecommuters check voice mail and e-mail? Do they have high-speed Internet? How quickly could they get to the office if they were needed?

Nobody pretends that telecommuting is a panacea for everyone. “There clearly are some jobs that would not be suitable for telecommuting or remote work,” Mr. Houghton says. And some employers express concerns about possible isolation and the loss of community.

As vice president of a public relations firm in Seattle, William Brent knows the value of “water-cooler moments” in the office. But as a telecommuter himself one day a week, he also understands the advantages of flexibility.

These days, he hears colleagues talk about trying to work at home more or share rides. “As long as you get your work done, it doesn’t matter too much where you do it,” Mr. Brent says. Junior staffers, who might need more guidance, typically spend more time in the office.

When Brent moved to Seattle three years ago, he planned his work and living arrangements “to avoid exactly what is happening with oil prices.” He walks from home to a ferry, takes a half-hour ferry ride to Seattle, then walks to his office.

Kehs, who telecommutes occasionally at her current job in Washington, D.C., thinks most people know their skills well enough to judge where they work best.

“Some say, ‘I wouldn’t want to telecommute, because I’d be

distracted.’ Obviously you have to work with a high level of independence, initiative, and structure.”

Gas prices are only one factor making a case for telecommuting, says Gil Gordon, a telecommuting consultant in Monmouth Junction, N.J. He notes that some commuters affected by a transit strike in Denver last month and by long-term construction on the Dan Ryan Expressway in Chicago could also benefit from it.

Challenger cites another catalyst that could spur the growth of a “telecommuter nation” - the threat of a pandemic. He thinks businesses could find many employees unwilling to report to work.

Even without that threat, Challenger offers this advice: “Companies should be addressing the issue [of telecommuting] now, before they lose people. People are concerned that it’s too expensive to come to work. Companies need to come up with alternative solutions to make life easier.”

By Marilyn Gardner | Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

TELECOMMUTING STRATEGIES:

Workplace experts offer the following suggestions for employees who wish to consider telecommuting one or more days a week:

- *Ask yourself: Do I have the self-discipline necessary to work at home with minimal supervision? Am I well organized? Does my job lend itself to telecommuting?*
- *If the answers are yes, prepare a written proposal for your manager. Outline specifically how the plan will work and how it will benefit the company.*
 - *Indicate that it is often possible to be more productive at home, where there may be fewer interruptions than in the office.*
- *Assure your manager that you will be available for conference calls and meetings by phone.*
 - *Suggest a trial period. If it doesn’t work out, the arrangement will end.*
 - *Be sure you have adequate technology at home, as well as appropriate work space. The kitchen table won’t do.*

Managers, too, can weigh the pros and cons of telecommuting by asking:

- *Does this employee have the right temperament to work alone?*
- *Am I willing to be open-minded and give the arrangement a chance to succeed?*
 - *How will I keep in touch with telecommuters?*