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New Research from EBRI:

Wellness Programs Appear to Improve Medication Adherence for Some Diseases but Not Others

WASHINGTON—Workplace wellness programs appear to have a bigger impact on medication adherence for some diseases than others, according to new research from the nonpartisan Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI).

Using actual health claims data from a large Midwest manufacturer that increased financial incentives to workers participating in its workplace wellness programs, EBRI found improved medication adherence among workers with two of six chronic diseases.

Specifically, EBRI found that biometric screenings (a key part of the wellness program) led to improved medication adherence for those with high blood pressure and depression. However, the screenings had no impact on medication adherence for those with four other chronic conditions, including cholesterol problems (dyslipidemia), diabetes, congestive heart failure, and asthma/chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases.

Health risk assessments and biometric screenings are increasingly used by employers that offer health insurance to identify existing or potential health issues among their plan members. The hope is that information derived from these wellness programs will prompt patients to make meaningful lifestyle changes, use preventive care, and commence and comply with recommended treatment.

Paul Fronstin, director of EBRI's Health Research and Education Program and co-author of the report, said the findings support earlier EBRI research that biometric screenings led to increased prescription drug use for high blood pressure and depression. However, he added, more research is needed to quantify the economic costs and consequences of wellness programs, since they may generate longer-term cost offsets and productivity enhancements for some chronic diseases.

"Whether these future benefits outweigh the costs is an empirical question that needs a longer-term study and a greater number of wellness programs," Fronstin said.

The full report, "Impact of Workplace Wellness-Program Participation on Medication Adherence," is published in the January 2016 *EBRI Notes* and online at www.ebri.org

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