

HSA Healthline

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CEO CORNER

"Right" or "Left," HSAs may be the answer

By Lynn Paulson, CEO

If you've hit bottom, stop digging. If it's broke, fix it. National health care is a front-burner issue this election year. Given that the U.S. now spends about 16 percent of its GDP on health care -- which is double the average of other industrialized countries -- and is still only in the middle or sometimes even bottom of most basic health care rankings -- it's a topic that needs to be debated.

The left seems to want the government to find a way to provide more coverage, whereas the right wants more choices. Similarly, the left generally thinks employers and the government should pay for care, while the right generally feels individuals should be able to buy policies tailored to their needs.

The right is more focused on competition and the left is focused on expanding coverage.

It's a debate that will continue and one that doesn't have an easy answer. It seems everyone is long on ideas and short on specifics (how do we pay for it).

Either way, change is going to require a major paradigm shift in terms of how we handle our health care. Over time, doing nothing is not an option if we want to avoid fiscal catastrophe. No matter what position you may take in the national health care debate, I think there are two major issues that need to be addressed.

The first issue is overall wellness. Unless we, as a population, make a concerted effort to change our lifestyles to promote and reward wellness, the health care crisis will only worsen. Whether we "pay" people to adopt healthy lifestyles or penalize those who do not, there may need to be some sort of monetary incentive to get and stay healthy. The entire health care crisis may be avoidable if we were to eliminate the preventable health problems that come from unhealthy lifestyle choices.

The second issue is overhauling the bureaucracy that permeates every nook and cranny of the health care

system -- especially in the health care administration area. Utilize technology for consistency in medical records to make health care costs and quality transparent. Ultimately, people need to have "skin in the game." At its core, that is what HSAs and consumer-directed health care is all about.

We may do well to let the free market work its magic by doing what it does best -- drive down prices while improving quality. Conversely, giving something away for nothing sends the message it has no value and is generally a recipe for fiscal disaster.



Making the leap from "Monopoly money"

By Lori Doele, Business Development Officer

By engaging and empowering employees, high-deductible health plans (HDHPs) coupled with Health Savings Accounts (HSAs) can make employees accountable for health care spending and the potential to control costs very real.

For a moment, let's think about the game Monopoly. Mike rolls the dice and his eyes light up as he realizes where he's about to land -- Boardwalk, and it's packed with hotels. Mike doles out a stack of Monopoly money. After all, it's not real money he's parted with, right?

So would Mike approach things differently if he had more skin in the game? What if a significant amount of his own money was actually at stake? That's the basic premise of a high-deductible health plan: with greater responsibility for managing

health care costs, employees are becoming health-conscious consumers, which can help curb spiraling health care costs for both the employer and employee.

The five steps toward HDHP/HSA success:

Step 1. Recognize that success with a major change requires a company's commitment and time. Success requires hard work, time and leadership, but the results are well worth the effort to employers and employees.

Step 2. Educate and communicate benefits early and often to employees, with a targeted focus. Remember the old baseball adage that stated you can't hit what you can't see. Education is the key to hitting a home run here.

Step 3. Win their hearts and minds by

investing in the cost-sharing equation. Shared accountability involves both parties stepping up to the plate.

Step 4. Provide access for decision-support information and tools. Provide your employees with access to support, information and tools that will facilitate empowerment.

Step 5. Encourage and enable healthier employee lifestyles. Smart is good, healthy is good. Both is even better.

There's nothing quick or easy about making the leap from Monopoly money to embodying shared accountability with educated HSA owners. You, the HSA owner, are an integral participant in managing soaring health care costs. In doing so, the potential rewards are significant.

Drink to your health ... drink water

By Amanda Lindholm, HSA Advisor

Nature's most abundant resource is also the nutrient many people are lacking ... pure and simple water. Although it is not a radical new idea to come about in the 21st century, it is an epidemic affecting millions of Americans. Yet the solution is so simple: drink more water!

Drinking a steady supply of water every day can help any person on any regimen. Trying to lose weight? Water acts as a natural appetite suppressant. When you start to feel hungry, try drinking a glass of water. Sometimes the feeling of hunger is dehydration in disguise. Feeling sluggish? Reach for a glass of energy-filled H₂O. Being dehydrated can affect your physical performance during the day. Don't believe it? Just ask a star athlete how he or she

would perform in a simple run after having a can of Diet Coke or a shot of espresso, rather than having a healthy dose of the natural stuff. What about headaches? Muscle aches? Even troubled skin? Amazing as it sounds, many times help is as close as a sink, a bottle or a glass.

After reading this, what should you do to become part of the healthy drinking club? Incorporate water into your routine. Experts say that drinking an average of eight glasses of water a day will keep you well-hydrated and provide many other benefits. Try drinking a glass of water when you wake up -- you will flush your system of toxins your body has been working all night to eliminate. Sip water from a water bottle at work instead of drinking soda or coffee -- you will develop

a healthy habit you won't even notice. Down a glass before sitting down for a meal -- it will help you eat less, and aid in digestion. Likewise, drink a glass during and after eating. Try incorporating these habits into your lifestyle, and see if you feel different. The impact can only be positive when you drink more water!

