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Prediction as a prelude to preventive healthcare

Companies need to understand that prediction is key to preventing their employees from falling prey to chronic diseases



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Dr. Subhasish Sircar

The newest trend in employee health and wellness is using health data and analytics to create focused wellness programs

I lost my best friend Sauptik due to cardiovascular complications just after he celebrated his 32nd birthday. He was a strapping, vibrant guy, who cared for his health and received health check-ups on a regular basis. Although he did not show any symptoms, Sauptik had many of the risk factors of heart disease. If the doctors had a tool that could predict future health, indicate the severity of risks factors, and explain how those risks can be systematically reduced, perhaps Sauptik could have spent more time with his wife and son. There are many Sauptiks around us. While many members of the workforce feel young,

healthy, and invincible, many underlying health risks can appear later on in life. One sobering fact is that approximately 1 out of 8 working Indians of ages 20-29 is either diabetic or pre-diabetic, and the numbers are even more staggering when we look at older age groups. There are about 15 other chronic diseases taking a toll on India's young workforce.

Predict to prevent

Most health screening companies attempt to identify the disease as soon as it presents itself. However, once cardiovascular diseases are contracted, they are difficult to reverse. Instead, identifying risk factors ahead of time is key to preventing a disease from ever manifesting in an individual. Analysing risk factors, predicting future health, and providing people with simple, individualized step-by-step plans to

mitigate those risks are key to prevention. The benefits of receiving evidence-based, individualized advice from doctors and nutritionists are immense.

Through the use of structured data and analytics, employers can discover the problems plaguing the health of their employees. Employers can view the aggregate information of their employees' health problems and come up with solutions that are customized to their workplace. This empowers employers with actionable insights and can measure the RoI of focused wellness programs.

In order to come up with individualized health recommendations as well as company-specific wellness programs, it is necessary to build awareness, acquire data, analyse the data and then act upon the findings. Sincere commitment to improving employee health calls for creating awareness at the workplace on various health risks and their impact. The next step is to acquire relevant health data on site including clinical data, personal health information, family medical history, known medical conditions, mental health, and stress factors. This data should then be analysed to predict each individual's disease risk propensity. Having done that, the ground is set to create individualized and company-specific health plans, policies, and initiatives and act on those goals. The goal of this process is to predict future health outcomes and prevent diseases before they ever manifest themselves.

Ensuring effectiveness of a wellness plan

Any health and wellness plan needs the support and constant drive of not only Human Resources personnel but also of the senior leadership to be successful. By promoting a health-focused culture from the top, company executives can make employees feel important and cared for thus ensuring sincere participation and adherence to the wellness initiatives.

Organizations should meticulously decide on a health and wellness service partner that provides services from the data collection step to wellness plan creation. As most people are highly sensitive about sharing their personal health information in their professional circle, it is important that the health and wellness service provider focuses on data security and confidentiality. The health plans should be customizable based on the employer's location and demographics and should have the capability to be rolled out across geographies and verticals. Since return on investment and enhanced productivity are important to employers, it is crucial that the service partner has the ability to measure the results of its plan and suggest specific actions and insights based on those results.

Analytics is the key to unlocking all wellness mysteries for individuals, groups, and large organizations. Employers then have the tools to ask for reductions in health insurance premiums and can expect significant decreases in absenteeism and presenteeism. Health and wellness service partners focused on prediction and prevention can help the other Sautpiks in this world celebrate more birthdays with their family and friends. Isn't that what all employers want to give their employees – a 'lifetime' hike?

Topics: Life @ Work, Employee Relations

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