

Opinion: Obesity Takes Toll At The Workplace

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It's no secret that obesity has reached crisis proportions in our community and the workplace.

Obesity costs U.S. companies an estimated \$13 billion per year and is associated with 39 million lost work days, which amounts to \$800 per person. When added up, the costs of paying for obesity-related healthcare and worker sick days can equal hundreds of thousand of dollars, depending on the number of employees.

Stepping Up

Decreased worker productivity is a major concern for all organizations, large or small, profit or nonprofit. Obesity causes more than 300,000 unnecessary deaths in this country every year, and excessive weight is connected with heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, arthritis, respiratory disease, and depression.

Fortunately, when people receive the right counsel and encouragement, they generally succeed in losing weight. When people of all ages and sizes improve their diet and increase their physical activity, they reduce many health risks - and ultimately, this improves the bottom line at work.

With this in mind, on Sept. 29, we at Central Massachusetts Independent Physician Association (CMIPA) tried to step up as role models by presenting our second annual Step Up for Weight Loss 3-Mile Walk & Health Fair at Saint Vincent Hospital. Our event was a great way to bring attention to the perils of excessive weight, and I'd like to thank all the walkers (including CMIPA patients and physicians), sponsors, and volunteers who helped make this day a success.

CMIPA remains committed to this cause, and, as president of this organization, I am committed to raising the fitness bar for my patients, colleagues, and the general public. I am therefore renewing my pledge to stay fit, but I recognize that we all need to do more, personally and collectively, to fight this crisis.

With this in mind, we at CMIPA have added an ongoing fitness initiative to our wellness efforts: The national You're It. Get Fit! program includes realistic workout routines, as simple as walking every day. We encourage employers to endorse programs like this so their staff will adopt healthier lifestyles. You might consider forming office teams and leading the way as company role models. Or employees can sign up individually. For information on how to register in this program, visit www.cmipa.com.

Together, we can tackle this crisis, but it can only happen one step at a time. Let's start by recognizing the problem and resolving to be part of the solution. Let's bring wellness to the workplace - and improve our physical and fiscal fitness.

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