

Working well and well at work

Alison Clark explains how there are opportunities to make healthy changes by going out into the workplace.

Even with the latest economic downturn, it is estimated that over half of the UK population is in employment. Therefore, the workplace presents an ideal opportunity to initiate health programmes.

My professional involvement with corporate and workplace health started in 2006 when I was asked to work on health roadshows for various organisations and businesses across the UK, such as the BBC, Transport for London, Bechtel and Channel 4.

A variety of health practitioners, including dietitians, are available at the roadshows offering advice and information to employees on a range of health topics such as incorporating exercise into daily life, self-examination, smoking cessation, optimal nutrition and alcohol awareness. These roadshows also feature health screening checks such as cholesterol testing, blood pressure and blood sugar testing.

Promoting health and wellbeing, facilitating behavioural change and providing in-house corporate health services is becoming increasingly popular in business to ensure that employees are working well and are well at work, because good health is good business!

The importance of corporate health and wellbeing is mirrored in large events such as the Health and Wellbeing @ Work Conference at the NEC in Birmingham, which started in 2007 and which for the past two years I have been delighted to support through the running of the BDA stand, which was managed by the Freelance Dietitians Group (FDG).

I volunteered to run a competition in order to attract delegates over to the stand and the prize was a day of free nutritional consultancy in the workplace, provided by my company, AC Health and Nutrition Ltd (ACHN).

The lucky winner was Hannah Edwards, Occupational Health Adviser from Imperial Tobacco Ltd, based in Nottingham. Prior to our meeting, Hannah and I discussed the



services which I could offer to the company and how to get the most benefit out of the day.

After an early start, I travelled from my home in Essex to Nottingham where Hannah and her colleagues made me feel very welcome.

I held private consultations with three employees, all of whom Hannah wished me to see due to the complex medical history and dietary advice required. After meeting the catering department to promote the importance of good nutrition and to encourage their involvement with future health promotion campaigns, I gave a nutritional seminar to nine Senior Managers.

Positive feedback following the seminar proved that they all understood the link between the importance of good nutrition and a healthy workforce. One Senior Manager also had the opportunity to reflect on his own health. "I found the 45 minutes with Alison very informative and entertaining. From this session I have got a better understanding of my risks and required changes to migrate these risks. The booklets offered and the visual tools used during the session supported my very good impression."

My enthusiasm and commitment to corporate health has led me to give several seminars on the benefits of a healthy workforce through healthy eating, and I was pleased to be invited to speak at the Department of Health on good nutrition

for employees when working in a busy, pressured environment.

An excellent example of a health initiative targeting a hard-to-reach group was a recent campaign at the Department of Health, which broached the sensitive topic of testicular cancer. After meetings with the company's catering department it was agreed to serve ball shaped food for a week with supporting literature about testicular cancer and self examination on offer. We had fun thinking of the ball-shaped foods we could serve – for example the menu featured melon balls and meatballs!

Although initiatives such as this are light-hearted, they are underpinned by a serious health promotion message and there is evidence of the economic and social value of a healthy and productive workforce, especially in these credit crunching times.

As this article shows there is a lot of exciting and varied work happening around the UK at the moment, so the question is – would you like to influence employees to work well and be well at work?

If so, ACHN works in a variety of locations in the UK delivering a range of services such as corporate health, PR campaigns and roadshows so if you are interested in working on a freelance consultancy basis for ACHN, then please e-mail alison@achn.co.uk. I look forward to hearing from you.

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