

Report Finds Cancer Requires Right Mix of Benefits

From [Human Resources Report](#)

By [Genevieve Douglas](#)

Oct. 27 — Supporting employees with a cancer diagnosis requires coordination of many employer programs, from health insurance to pharmacy benefits to the employee assistance program, Laurel Pickering, president and chief executive officer of the Northeast Business Group on Health, told Bloomberg BNA Oct. 27.

Employers say there's a level of complexity in managing employees' cancer-related needs that is not associated with most other conditions, and as a result, they need help in evaluating the quality of cancer care their benefits dollars are purchasing, a report released Oct. 22 by NEBGH, an employer-led coalition of health-care leaders and other stakeholders, found.

First and foremost, however, the report, "Cancer and the Workplace: The Employer Perspective," found that most employers are concerned with providing two main services: quality of care for their employees and support for them throughout their "cancer journey," Pickering said.

The report's findings are based on a survey of employers, discussions with employers and a spring 2015 multi-stakeholder working roundtable comprised of more than 30 executives from large, self-insured companies, health plans and consulting organizations.

Understanding Cancer

"The high cost of cancer care is a big concern for employers, but even before addressing those costs, they want to understand what exactly it is they are purchasing," Pickering said.

According to Pickering, employers need clear guidelines and outcomes data to assess cancer care quality and value, and they also need resources for providing guidance and support to employees with a cancer diagnosis or a diagnosis in their family.

"Fear is a huge factor," she said, and benefits managers want to be better equipped to deal with the emotional toll and the myriad confusing treatment options, disability issues and financial ramifications associated with a cancer diagnosis.

The report recommends that employers, health plans and other stakeholders work together to improve outcomes-based cancer data so that employers can better understand the impact of care on their employees. Employers should also strive to assemble cancer resources in one place for employees, it said.



HR as Coordinator

HR professionals should be the advocates to make sure cancer programs feature the best health-care providers and vendors, Pickering said. By coordinating the various programs, HR can make the patient experience seamless, which is a huge help to an individual going through this ordeal, she said.

HR must also play the role of communicator, Pickering added. "We find that oftentimes, employers have these great programs in place, but nobody is using them," she said. Employees usually are not looking for these benefits until there is a diagnosis, and knowing whom to talk to and what is available is critical, she said.

Finally, Pickering advised that company leadership needs to be on board to put cancer-related programs in place. "It's worth spending money on these programs, and it's the right thing to do," she said.