

UPS Healthy Connections – Informed Choices in the News

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Since suffering two heart attacks within one week in April 2006, Dearborn resident Roland Klekner lost 47 pounds, cut his prescription medications from 11 to zero, and reduced his body mass index from a clinically obese 31 to a healthier 26.

Klekner, a supervisor in the industrial engineering department at UPS in Livonia, says he could not have done it without the support of his health coach, registered nurse Cathy Pardiny. The two phone regularly as part of UPS Healthy Connections-Informed Choices, a health management program the package delivery company began offering its employees and their families last year.

"Having the heart attack was something scary," said Klekner, 58. "To have Cathy there as support, giving me direction and hope in being able to achieve my health goals -- that was the main thing that kept me going and got me to achieve those goals."

Klekner, who has worked for UPS for 33 years, is one of 7,500 UPS employees in Michigan eligible to connect with a health coach -- a registered nurse who offers advice on medication, nutrition, diet and other health concerns to employees with chronic conditions such as asthma, diabetes and coronary artery disease. The service is available at no cost for all UPS employees, retirees and their dependents enrolled in a UPS-administered health plan.

UPS, the nation's third-largest employer with 360,600 employees, launched the program for nonunionized employees in April 2006 and extended it to unionized employees in February 2007. Atlanta-based UPS invested \$40 million to \$60 million to start the program, said Randall Price, UPS corporate health and productivity manager. After this year, the program will cost \$6 million to \$10 million annually to maintain.

Long-term patient care

Pardiny, one of about 80 health coaches, is employed by Aetna Inc. and works from an office in Chantilly, Va. UPS contracts with Aetna and UnitedHealth for health coaches, who are based in Chantilly and Atlanta, Ga. Case managers, who help guide employees during their inpatient stays in hospitals, are from Aetna, UnitedHealth, Blue Cross and Cigna, and work from Chicago, Atlanta, Pittsburgh and Allentown, Pa.

Despite the 500 miles between her office and Klekner's, Pardiny said helping him manage his blood pressure, weight and diet is unique because it allows for long-term contact with a patient, something her previous 20 years in nursing did not always allow. She coaches about six UPS employees over the phone every day.

"It's a really neat thing because as a bedside nurse you're very limited in the time you can spend with a person. They come in and they're sick, or they're just out of surgery," she said. "With Roland, it's been over a year now and we've been talking and watching things progress."

About 4,300 UPS employees in the United States work with a health coach, and 7,800 to 8,000 more have worked with a case manager, Price said.

UPS employees schedule regular calls with their health coach at their own convenience -- Klekner usually chats with Pardiny before his workday starts at 8:30 a.m. -- and they can call their coach at any time.

During his 5-month recovery, Klekner spoke with Pardiny once every 2 weeks about his blood pressure, weight and exercise regimen. As his recovery progressed, their contact tapered to once a month, then once every 2 months. Pardiny sent him information on diets, advising him to stay away from saturated fats, and taught him about lowering his body mass index, a measurement of body fat based on height and weight.

They last spoke in April and plan to reconnect in September, before Klekner is scheduled to take a treadmill stress test to check his blood pressure, heart rate and artery blockage.

Pardiny remains a key part of his recovery, Klekner said. He said, "You see the light at the end of the tunnel, and she's there to recommend things that I can discuss with my doctor and work on to achieve those goals."

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