

Curbing absenteeism through affordable healthcare

A trend in sick leave soaring at certain times of the year led to an investigation that found that this was mostly due to staff not being able to afford medical care.

“We found that lack of access to adequate healthcare and medical benefits affected our employees’ ability to perform and in some cases led to absenteeism,” explains Lorrette Coetzee of engineering firm, TDS Projects.



Little choice in affordable products

This culminated in launching an employee occupational health benefits programme aimed at improving the lives of its staff. The initiative, administered by OCSACare, supports employee wellness for TDS employees working on sites in remote areas.

Some staff members were already on the cheapest medical aid options, but still experienced difficulties in getting access to medical care due to the restrictions that these funds imposed on both the members as well as on the service providers.

In seeking help, TDS turned to Rudolf de Bruyn of Optivest Health Solutions who is responsible for administering TDS’s staff medical aid programme. “We enquired about the availability of affordable products for blue-collar workers in the market and were surprised to find that there was very little choice.”

Occupational health product

“We were adamant that we wanted an affordable product that provided good service and quality products to our staff. Optivest provided various options and among them was OCSACare which provided the ideal solution as it is not a medical aid but an occupational health product.”

Evidence shows that workplace health programmes can be highly effective in promoting healthy behaviours and ensuring employers offer South Africans a healthy and safe working environment.

Removing the elitist stigma

Recent media reports indicate that medical aid contributions will be increasing drastically, which for TDS management

indicates the worrying prospect that private medical care is set to become a luxury that few can afford. “We cannot emphasise the value of our staff enough and it is disheartening that statistically only around 20% of all employees can afford private healthcare,” Coetzee says.

“The aim is to access respectable basic medical care, prevent and manage sickness and disease timeously, provide access to local medical service providers in remote areas thereby eliminating the additional travel costs, achieving an improved work life and removing the ‘elitist’ stigma around medical care by providing everyone with the same benefits.”

Coetzee says that at the moment these benefits extend to the main member as a first priority because they would most likely be the breadwinner for their family but hopes to find an affordable option to extend care to family members in the future. “Helping our employees – and eventually their families too – creates a win-win situation. We are able to improve the general state of health of our employees and TDS benefits by managing sick leave and limiting absenteeism which has an undesirable effect on productivity.”

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