

Law firm creates environment of wellness

Plews Shadley Racher & Braun LLP (PSRB) is well known for its long history in environmental law. What many people may not know about, however, is PSRB's equally longstanding environment of wellness. "PSRB has had a wellness program since it was founded nearly 25 years ago," says partner and health care & life sciences practice group chair John Bridge, adding that it was a revolutionary idea when the firm started in August of 1988. "In the early years, it involved an exercise program complete with a personal trainer who would visit the firm."

The focus on health and wellness has grown along with the firm. Three times a week, the firm now offers onsite core strengthening and yoga classes for employees to attend at no charge. PSRB provides an exercise area complete with equipment that staff members can use whenever they have a break or need to reduce stress. Walking, running and biking groups routinely form both formally and informally.

The firm provides healthy snacks such as pretzels, fresh fruit and unlimited bottled water for employees to grab whenever they need sustenance. Healthy options are always available for the daily lunch order. In addition, PSRB has a "healthy lunch series" where it brings in a speaker on a specific health topic and provides a free healthy lunch to all employees who attend.

Even the end-of-year bonus has traditionally included a link to health! Surveys have been sent to staff members in December with questions such as "Have you not smoked in the last year?"; "Do you wear your seatbelt 99.5 percent of the time you



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drive or ride in a motor vehicle?"; and "Have you participated in at least two organized events (5K or longer) or completed the Mini Marathon?" Staff members were able to earn a "health incentive bonus" of \$50 for each healthy habit they achieved.

The Indiana Department of Health recently recognized PSRB's efforts by selecting the firm as one of only 20 small business worksites to receive aerobic and strength training equipment. The State gave PSRB a \$2,500 voucher to buy items, including dumbbells with a rack, a stationary bike, Exertube resistance bands, yoga mats, a bike rack, a pedometer and a heart rate monitor.

PSRB also has automatic defibrillators in each of its five buildings at its Indianapolis location as well as at its South Bend office in case an employee or visitor has a cardiac event. Thankfully, they have never had to be used! The firm also has offered CPR classes to all staff members.

Perhaps one of the most innovative health and wellness initiatives provided to full-time employees and their family members on PSRB's health insurance plans is the relationship with Novia CareClinics LLC. PSRB became a Novia client in the fall of 2012. Participants can utilize the services of Novia's first multi-employer center for downtown Indianapolis employers, conveniently located at 429 N.

Pennsylvania St. in the historic Stenz Building.

"When the original model for the workplace health & wellness center was one employer/one center, the centers could only be open for short periods," says Bridge. "One of Novia's clients said they wanted to share the costs of its center with another nearby employer, and today the model of a health center for small and medium-sized employers is switching to a shared health and wellness center. It works very well for our firm, which has about 60 employees. Every one of the five employers sharing our center on Pennsylvania Street has equal access to it, almost like we are a 1,000-employee business with our own center."

The 1,200-square-foot health & wellness center offers primary care services at NO CHARGE to registered participants and is open more than 30 hours a week. PSRB employees can schedule appointments online and have access to a doctor and nurses, lab work, and nearly 150 common generic drugs, all at no cost to the patient. With the convenience and no-cost concept, it's nearly impossible not to take advantage of it, even for busy professionals who are hesitant to stop the clock for health and wellness.

Speaking of wellness, the center offers a wellness coach who works with participants on their personal health challenges, such as obesity, managing diabetes or smoking cessation. The wellness coach educates, motivates and encourages participants to move toward more healthy lifestyles to decrease the host of health problems associated with these various challenges. The wellness coach visits PSRB for lunch sessions to share important health information

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and sponsors fun events such as a contest to encourage participants to drink more water.

You may wonder whether this health & wellness center concept can help your firm. It can and will in a number of ways. The first is the transactional value. Instead of paying retail at a hospital or doctor's office, the employers are paying wholesale – paying doctors and nurses an hourly fee without markup and paying wholesale for labs and generic medications. Because of the realized savings to employers, participating employees and their families get the services for free, which encourages better preventive health care participation as well as helps to eliminate barriers to health care. Preventive care helps participants to avoid illness and detect any health issues early, avoiding acute and chronic care, which results in even more health care savings.

Bridge says employers also see improved productivity from employees. "Normally, employees must take off a half-day to see their doctors. However, they can go to Novia around the corner and return in half an hour thanks to the clinic's always-on-schedule, 20-minute visits. The quality of care is also better since that's longer than the average 5-7 minutes a patient spends with their family doctor." He added, "I think PSRB may be the first Novia client that bills by the hour. You can't bill effectively when you're home sick, with sick kids, or not at your best because you don't feel well. Any time saved by getting quality care, but in a short time period, will benefit professional firms like ours."

Bridge says employers who use health & wellness centers typically see healthier employees and experience improvements in rates of absenteeism and presenteeism

(when employees are at work but not feeling their best or at their most productive).

It's still early for PSRB to calculate hard cost savings from its relationship with Novia. Those cost savings typically appear after the first year. Novia clients with similar health & wellness programs have seen leveling off, and in some cases reductions, in per-employee costs for health care soon after establishing the health & wellness benefit.

"Any law firm, accounting firm, architecture firm or other professional company could benefit from a similar relationship," said Bridge. "Our people have expressed true delight at the high quality of care, the ease and timeliness of getting appointments, and the lack of any cost to them. We expect this to be a win for everybody." 🍷

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