

Ardent Health Services

Melanie Miller

ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT OF COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS



New Wellness Program Gets Employees Feeling Better About Health, Benefits

Just as Ardent Health Services employees make a difference in the lives of those they treat, the company is making a difference in its workers' lives.

Melanie Miller, assistant vice president of Compensation and Benefits, championed an innovative wellness program that is changing the way employees think about their own health.

In 2009, Ardent decided to embrace a participatory approach to employee health care. Company executives hoped their nearly 8,000 employees would embrace it, too. Thanks in large part to Miller, the company achieved nearly 92% participation in the first year.

However, high participation in the new program did not stem the rising cost of health care premiums. In an attempt to stave off another large increase in the 2010 plan year, Ardent decided to try something new just before open enrollment.

A voluntary program was devised and launched to help employees offset some of their health care premiums based on certain wellness indicators: BMI, blood pressure, cholesterol, nicotine use, and glucose—much like the way good drivers receive preferred rates from their insurance companies.

Ardent would continue to pay the majority of benefit costs, but the organization also wanted employees to see their benefits as a partnership. "We wanted employees

to be appreciative of the benefits the company pays for," said Miller, a sponsor for the wellness program and advocate for employee communication. "We wanted them to feel more accountable for their health and well-being, so they'd see the impact of their choices."

Despite the advantages of the program, Ardent officials feared employees might not support a program that linked health premiums to wellness. "It was a big change from anything we'd ever done before," Miller said. "We were afraid we'd get negative feedback from employees who didn't feel they should have to lose weight or to do the right things to be healthy."

In addition to introducing the wellness program, Ardent wanted to consolidate benefits information so employees could find answers and make good decisions. A fresh, strategic approach to benefits communications was just what the doctor ordered, including a website with integrated social media features and supporting print materials. A visual brand was created, with the tagline: "Know more, choose better, live well."

Launching a wellness campaign, an open enrollment campaign, and a branded website simultaneously is no small feat and is a testament to Miller leadership skills and enthusiasm to pull it off. But her hard work more than paid off, with high participation rates and healthier employees.

Ardent received more positive responses than it ever had before during the enrollment process. Nearly 92% of employees participated in the wellness program, and more than 3,400 employees visited the benefits website in the first three months, spending an average of seven minutes with each visit. The new resources are valuable to current employees and their families, as well as recruits.

"Our Human Resources directors in the field are telling us they're proud to show the benefits website to new employees and candidates," Miller said. "I think it has really made a difference." ■

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Company:
Ardent Health Services

Headquarters: Nashville, TN

Website:
www.ardenthealth.com,
www.getardentbenefits.com

No. of employees: 7,800

Nature of business: Ardent Health Services invests in quality health care. In people, technology, facilities, and communities, Ardent makes considerable investments—producing high quality care and extraordinary results. Ardent's subsidiaries own and operate eight hospitals, a multispecialty physician group, a health plan, and a nationally recognized medical laboratory.

Key executives:

David T. Vandewater, *president and CEO*

Neil Hemphill, *senior vice president, Human Resources/ Administration*

Steve Petrovich, *senior vice president and general counsel*

Jim Schnuck, *senior vice president, Financial Operations*

Clint Adams, *chief accounting officer*

Key providers:

Bravo Wellness, *wellness program*

Benz Communications, *benefit communications*

Lovelace Health Plan and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of OK, *medical*

Delta Dental of Tennessee, *dental*