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Value of Business Coalitions in Implementing Bridges to Excellence Programs

*Adapted from an article by **Andrew Webber**, president and chief executive officer of the National Business Coalition on Health in Washington, D.C. NBCH (at www.nbch.org) has a membership of nearly 90 employer-led coalitions in the United States, representing more than 7,000 employers and 34 million employees and their dependents.*

In April of 2006, eight employers in Colorado Springs (CO), representing 50,000 lives, announced that they are participating in a Bridges to Excellence (BTE) program (www.bridgestoexcellence.org), a pay for performance program that rewards physicians who provide top quality care to patients. This program is focused on helping to control the cost of diabetes for employees and their dependents while increasing the overall quality of health care for the participants.

The eight employers are members of the Colorado Business Group on Health (CBGH), a non-profit coalition based in Denver (www.coloradohealthonline.org). They include the City of Colorado Springs, Colorado College, Colorado Springs School District #11, Colorado Springs Utilities, El Paso County, Intel, Memorial Health System, and Penrose-St. Francis Health Services. David Lord, director of special projects for Colorado College and chair of the CBGH diabetes program, credits CBGH with the successful launch of the program. “A large group such as CBGH gives employers more leverage in negotiating with healthcare providers, insurance companies, and health plans.”

In 2004, CBGH (a member of the National Business Coalition on Health) worked with its employer members to develop a program that focused on diabetes among employees and their dependents. The program goals included increasing the rate of early detection of diabetes, improving the amount and quality of diabetes education offered, and improving benefit designs for those with diabetes.

The diabetes BTE program recently implemented in Colorado Springs will reward physicians who meet the standards for diabetes care from the National Committee for Quality Assurance. These standards encourage physicians to work in collaboration with their patients to avoid the serious complications that can result when diabetes is not managed appropriately. Physicians who treat employees and/or their dependents with diabetes will be eligible for as much as \$100 per patient per year if standards are met.

The diabetes BTE program will also include incentives for employees and their family members with diabetes. For instance, beneficiaries may earn up to \$200 in cash for participating in wellness activities such as joining a gym or completing a health risk assessment.

Donna Marshall, executive director of CBGH, says the BTE program demonstrates what employers can accomplish by working together. “The eight employers in this diabetes BTE program are expecting to see improvements in costs and quality in the years to come. They also recognize that we have to embrace a wide range of initiatives to get the outcomes we need in terms of lower costs and better health care.”

Colorado College is one example of an employer that uses a combination of strategies to contain healthcare costs. Three years ago, the college started a self-funded insurance program for its 600 employees and 1,500 covered lives. In subsequent years the college added wellness and illness prevention initiatives. As a result of this multi-faceted approach, the college anticipates a 4% rise in its healthcare costs for the coming academic year – a significant decrease from the 15% to 18% annual increases the college experienced previously.

CBHG affords its members the opportunity to discuss the problem of increasing healthcare costs with other employers and to share successful solutions. Lord says, “As a member of CBGH, we can share best practices, review educational materials used by other employers and buy services for health screenings in bulk. It would be much more difficult to accomplish these things as an individual employer.”

BTE programs combined with wellness initiatives can help to change the healthcare system from one that reacts to illness to one that rewards healthy behaviors. CBHG believes that this is the best way to control healthcare costs in the long-term.