

May 2007

## “Consumer Engagement”: Great Expectations for Employees – and Their Employers

Dale Shaller  
*Shaller Consulting*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://jdc.jefferson.edu/vbp>



Part of the [Health Economics Commons](#)

[Let us know how access to this document benefits you](#)

### Recommended Citation

Shaller, Dale (2007) "“Consumer Engagement”: Great Expectations for Employees – and Their Employers," *Value-Based Purchasing Newsletter*. Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 1.

Available at: <https://jdc.jefferson.edu/vbp/vol2/iss1/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Jefferson Digital Commons. The Jefferson Digital Commons is a service of Thomas Jefferson University's [Center for Teaching and Learning \(CTL\)](#). The Commons is a showcase for Jefferson books and journals, peer-reviewed scholarly publications, unique historical collections from the University archives, and teaching tools. The Jefferson Digital Commons allows researchers and interested readers anywhere in the world to learn about and keep up to date with Jefferson scholarship. This article has been accepted for inclusion in Value-Based Purchasing Newsletter by an authorized administrator of the Jefferson Digital Commons. For more information, please contact: [JeffersonDigitalCommons@jefferson.edu](mailto:JeffersonDigitalCommons@jefferson.edu).

---

## **“Consumer Engagement”: Great Expectations for Employees – and Their Employers**

### **Cover Page Footnote**

Funding support for this e-journal has been provided by Johnson & Johnson Healthcare Systems, which also supported development and updates to the College curriculum. The College also wishes to acknowledge annual program support from AstraZeneca, and 2007 regional meeting sponsorships from Sanofi-Aventis and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Tennessee.

**From the Editor**

## **“Consumer Engagement”: Great Expectations for Employees -- and Their Employers**

Health care consumers of all stripes – young and old, healthy and sick, employed and retired – are increasingly being asked to take on more responsibility for their health and health care. Most current strategies for health care reform, including consumer-directed health plans and medical savings accounts, set high expectations for individual behavior. In this emerging era of “consumer engagement,” individuals are being asked to take on a long and daunting set of “responsible behaviors.” Just a partial list of these behaviors includes:

- Following recommendations for promoting personal health (such as diet, exercise, quitting smoking, limiting alcohol use, wearing seat belts, etc.)
- Getting screened at appropriate intervals (for cancer and other conditions)
- Establishing a relationship with a primary care provider
- Managing chronic conditions to prevent decline in health status
- Comparing coverage options when selecting health plans
- Selecting competent doctors and safe hospitals
- Choosing effective treatments
- Taking drugs as directed
- Interacting successfully with health professionals and institutions
- Maintaining accurate records of personal medical history

Clearly, the vast majority of people do not engage in these behaviors. Many do not even realize that they are expected to act in these ways. Others are unable to take on these expected behaviors because they lack the information, skills, cognitive or physical abilities, or material resources to do so.

If “consumer engagement” is to become more than just the latest catch phrase (or worse, an excuse for employers to shift the growing financial burden of health care to their workers), purchasers will need to take a much more aggressive role in equipping their employees and their dependents to assume the wide range of personal responsibilities increasingly expected of them. Specifically, employers and union leaders must work together to develop and implement an infrastructure of communication, information, incentives, and interventions that will inform, motivate, and support people in adopting these behaviors.

Growing expectations for consumer behavior mean even greater expectations – not less – for employers to provide needed information and support. The challenges and barriers are enormous, but there are promising models of

successful initiatives to change consumer behavior in even the most difficult circumstances. For example, as reported in a previous issue of Value-Based Purchasing (Volume 1, Issue 1), the Hotel and Restaurant Employees International Union has found success in multiple interventions aimed at increasing consumer use of preventive services, managing chronic disease, adhering to prescribed medications, and selecting higher performing family doctors. Other successful examples, such as Pitney Bowes and the City of Knoxville, also have been profiled in VBP and in our regular course offerings.

In this issue of VBP, we are pleased to include an interview with Debra Ness, President of the National Partnership for Women and Families. Debra offers the perspective of one of the nation's most influential consumer groups on the increasing role of consumers in making decisions about their health and health care. This interview highlights the importance of employers working with consumer groups to develop a united approach to engaging consumers in their health and health care. The benefits of doing so will accrue not only to individuals through better health and wellbeing, but to employers through increased control over costs and productivity, and to the nation as a whole through a safer, more efficient, and effective health care system.

Dale Shaller, Editor  
Value-Based Purchasing