

Using Health & Productivity Management to Maximize Human Capital and Enhance Training Benefits

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The traditional means of measuring the impact of less-than-optimal health on the workplace has been to determine the number of days an employee is absent from work. Consequently, the primary benefit of improving health has been seen as a decrease in missed work days although additional benefits also accrue as employees contribute more effectively to corporate goals and objectives when they are at work.

Health & Productivity Management (HPM) has expanded the consideration of the effects of sub-optimal health to the impact on employee performance while on the job. The costs of decreased performance (presenteeism) can be substantial, and have been estimated to outweigh the costs of absenteeism. However, improving employee health can definitely decrease the negative effects of presenteeism and yield substantial benefits. As resources shrink, HPM can be considered as a valuable tool to increase overall organizational output and productivity.

The HPM model of integrating wellness and prevention, chronic disease management, occupational health and safety, disability management, and organization health is just as valid within a military environment as for private business and industry. This model links military force health with mission accomplishment. The underlying premise is that the health of each Soldier, Sailor, Airman, and Marine affects force readiness and organizational performance. In other words, a healthy force is a ready force.

Readiness is the key issue for all the Armed Forces. The ultimate goal of every military activity must be to enhance force readiness. Addressing presenteeism, therefore, is a critical part of achieving force readiness, as every military mission is dependent on optimal levels of performance while on duty. These levels of performance include physical and mental capacities, which must be sustained at optimum levels especially during times of deployment. World events have accelerated the rate of deployments for Active Duty, Reserve, and National Guard personnel. While force readiness is always critical, the current high level of military operations makes force readiness more important now than perhaps ever before. Optimal force readiness relies on healthy human resources.

The additional consequences of sub-optimal health in the military can be seen in the area of training. The requirements for, and importance of, military training are reflected in the resources expended on it. . According to the Defense Manpower Data Center, the average cost to train one Service member for his or her respective position is \$28,800. This cost includes basic training and the first level of specialized training above it. . Overall, these training costs for the U.S. military totaled nearly \$14 billion in fiscal year 1999. (*Department of Defense institutional training resource trends, fiscal year 1999*. Report prepared for the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense; 1998) While these initial training costs are substantial, these figures do not even reflect the additional training required for specialized positions such as airborne units or Special Forces.

Obviously, then, it is critical to mitigate the impact of less-than-optimal health so that Service members are neither absent (i.e., missing training altogether, which must be made up at a later date), nor less than “fully present” during the training experience. Each troop must be at full mental and physical capacity in order to maximize the value and advantage of the training they receive.

Consider also that military training does not stop after basic and initial training, but continues throughout a Service member’s time in the military. The ongoing training requirements are often physically and mentally rigorous and demanding. Training often involves heavy equipment, complicated procedures, and dangerous materials. Additionally, human lives depends on the correct application of training information – making it critical that military personnel are performing at their full capabilities whether at their regular duty station or during military training.

Health & Productivity Management makes a valuable connection between health and on-duty performance. At a basic level, the application of HPM to the military impacts the performance of an individual Service member. However, this application has far reaching implications, as the health of each individual affects unit performance, organizational mission accomplishment, and overall force readiness. Ultimately, healthy human capital is a critical asset that will positively impact overall force readiness.