So many businesses offer gym memberships, health screenings for diabetes and prostate cancer, smoking cessation and weight-loss programs, and perhaps flu shots.

But what if a company wants to do more? What if it wants to make that work and wellness balance easier – and effective?

Batesville, and its parent company, Hillenbrand Inc., may have found the solution with its Health & Wellness Centers.

The independently managed and staffed facilities provide easy access to high-quality care delivered by a staff of medical professionals, and are designed not to replace the company’s traditional health plans, but to provide additional services for employees and their families who are already covered by a company health plan. Employees’ medical records, history and treatment plans are private.

“As we all know, health care is one of the biggest challenges we face today, both as employers and consumers. Costs are out of reach for many people, access is becoming more limited and the bureaucracy is driving consumers to look for alternative sources,” said Julie Joerger, director – global HR services, for Hillenbrand. “As an employer, we care about having employees and their families lead longer, healthier and more productive lives. We want to create compelling experiences for our associates in all areas, including health care.”

The first health and wellness center was built in Batesville, Indiana, in 2010. Today, that facility serves 2,792 Batesville and Hillenbrand employees and their dependents who work at the corporate center, at the company’s manufacturing plant in Batesville or who live in the area.

In December 2017, Hillenbrand opened its newest facility in Manchester, Tennessee, adjacent to the Batesville Casket manufacturing plant. In addition to the manufacturing plant, the company also operates a regional distribution center, a local customer service center and merchandising fulfillment center. This facility serves approximately 1,386 employees and dependents.
Each health and wellness center is unique in its size and design. The facility in Batesville features five treatment rooms, an intake room, lab, physical therapy area, seven offices, consultation room, occupational health space and a weight management suite. The new facility in Manchester has 5,500-square feet built out and features five treatment rooms, four physician’s offices, a lab, intake room, hearing booth, consultation room and weight center.

“We believe that health care costs are lower when prevention is more convenient,” Joerger said. “We have lower health care claims in locations where our employees and their dependents have access to a health and wellness center, higher medical compliance when people regularly receive the needed preventive care and maintenance medications to keep them healthy, and lower absentee rates.”

The idea for the health and wellness centers can be traced back a decade, when Hillenbrand Industries split into two separate companies – Hillenbrand Inc. and Hill-Rom.

“We had an opportunity (then) to create something new for our benefit platform,” Joerger said. “We began to evaluate the health care experiences of our employees – and it became painfully clear that the processes were burdened with non-value-added elements that, if eliminated, would dramatically improve their experience while reducing overall costs.”

For employees, there was not one thing that was a problem, but the entire process from finding a physician, booking an appointment, getting to and from the appointment, receiving and paying for care, getting medications, and finally, filing forms for reimbursement or payment. “In our lean mindset, we knew there had to be a better way,” Joerger said.

For example, the company looked at the non-value-added steps of a doctor’s visit. In a typical situation, the person seeking care had to wait to even schedule an appointment – delaying treatment – then sit in a crowded room far too long, then get just a few minutes with the doctor, check out – making co-pays where required and getting the paperwork needed to file for reimbursement. If the patient received a prescription, that required another trip to the pharmacy, payments, paperwork – essentially the process repeated itself.

“By understanding what was not working in the current health system, we have successfully eliminated the barriers of time, cost and bureaucracy – and replaced that with convenient, quality care,” Joerger said.

The health and wellness centers have been designed to be a primary source of convenient, quality health care, with a wide range of services – from sports physicals and pediatric immunizations to wellness exams, treating common illnesses such as sore throats and infections, managing chronic conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure, providing physical and occupational therapy, or providing solutions for weight management.

Employees can go online 24 hours a day to schedule an appointment or use the company call center. Depending on the need, employees get a 20-, 40- or 60-minute appointment. This isn’t time spent in the waiting room, Joerger is quick to point out, but time spent with a medical professional.

“Convenience is a key benefit,” Joerger said. “People can arrive, be seen by a doctor or nurse practitioner, receive medications if needed, and be out the door in less than an hour – without having to worry about co-pays, insurance forms or going to the pharmacy to pick up and pay for medications.”
Mari Jo Moody, vice president of human resources for Batesville, knows the importance of the health and wellness centers professionally and personally.

It was during a Super Bowl Sunday party at a friend’s house that one of Moody’s sons started complaining that his stomach hurt. By the time the family got home, the young boy was running a slight fever. The decision was made that Moody’s husband would stay home with the boy on Monday.

“I was in a meeting (on Monday) and I got a text from my husband saying my son could hardly swallow because it hurt so much,” Moody recalled. “I immediately go online and schedule an appointment for 2:30 p.m.”

Moody lives close to the company’s facilities, so she left work at 2:15 p.m., grabbed her son and headed straight back to the health and wellness center. The medical staff did both strep and flu tests. While the boy didn’t have strep, he did test positive for Flu B.

“I was able to have him seen by a medical professional, get him the medicine he needed and be back at my desk in about an hour,” Moody said. “That work-life balance is difficult for parents; having that access to health care that supports work-life balance at the same time,” Moody said.

While Joerger was convinced the health and wellness centers would have a positive impact, she says that impact is even bigger than she expected. “We expected that it would be making people healthier, saving money for them and saving money back to the company, but it’s been much more than that,” she said.

In its first year of operation in Batesville, the number of annual physicals received by employees increased by 300 percent. And today – eight years later – utilization at the original facility in Batesville remains high. In fact, 92 percent of employees and 86 percent of dependents have visited the health and wellness center.

Just as importantly, the health and wellness centers have made it easier for people to take a more active role in managing their health, including chronic conditions like high blood pressure and cholesterol, or to improve their quality of life by losing weight or stopping smoking, Joerger said.

“There have been employees who went in and saw a physician and found out about a condition they didn’t know they had, but which could be corrected, including people who were prediabetic, and who are fine now,” Joerger said, adding that there are also employees who have been able to get off of blood pressure or cholesterol medications by focusing on health and wellness.

The health and wellness centers allow for a holistic approach to care where the employee has access to other wellness services under one roof. The physician can walk down the hall to collaborate with other providers, such as a physical therapist, to ensure seamless, quality patient care with better outcomes.

This holistic approach was especially important for one Batesville employee recently, Joerger explained.

A doctor was walking through the waiting room at the Batesville location when he saw a man he knew pacing back and forth. The doctor greeted the man, who he had previously taken care of, and asked him what he was doing there since he wasn’t on the doctor’s list of patients that day. The employee told the doctor that he didn’t have an appointment, but that he wasn’t feeling well and just stopped in.

“The doctor knew that this man wasn’t a complainer and immediately brought him back to an examining room,” Joerger said. An onsite EKG was ordered and the results showed some heart issues, she added.

“The doctor said the man needed a stress test; a local facility said it would be a two-week wait,” Joerger said. “That was not acceptable to the doctor, who called a local hospital and got the test scheduled for the next morning. The man ended up having a quadruple bypass.”
As an employer, Hillenbrand and Batesville care about having employees and their families lead longer, healthier and more productive lives, Joerger said, adding, Those “compelling experiences” have also reaped big rewards for the company, including lower total health care costs, reduced absenteeism and faster recovery of workplace injuries, retention of employees and improved health of employees.

Joerger is quick to note that health care is a journey, and the company is always looking for ways to improve. The facility in Batesville continues to expand, and the company is testing a number of programs.

“It’s all about creating opportunities for employees and their families,” Joerger said. “We’ve been able to provide additional health and wellness services so they can live healthier, more productive and enjoyable lives.”

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