

Move Over Wellness: Understanding the Power of Disease Management Programs



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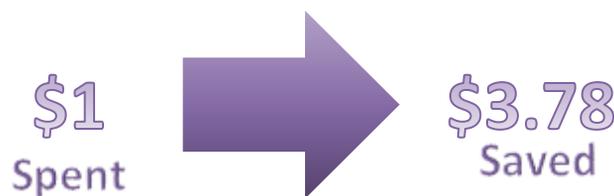
Your employees are struggling with illness and injury more often than you realize. They're probably struggling more than they even realize. Often unexpected, managing an illness or injury is overwhelming for all involved. Beyond the day-to-day emotional and physical challenges, patients and family caregivers must work hard to balance their job with medical, family and household demands, often with increased financial pressures. At the same time, employers are faced with increased medical costs, absenteeism, and lost productivity.



Over the last decade or so, many companies have rightly implemented wellness programs to help employees improve their health, handing out personal fitness trackers, promoting running and smoking cessation programs, etc. These programs have worked in helping employees maintain more healthy lifestyles and reduce the effects of lifestyle-related health care issues, but they don't help sick people manage illness.

Wellness programs are important and should be fully supported, but not at the expense of disease management. Not only is offering disease management tools the right thing to do, providing employees with the tools they need to better manage their medical conditions can also significantly reduce healthcare related costs.

A major RAND Corporation [study demonstrated the value of disease management programs](#). The seven-year study involving more than 67,000 PepsiCo employees found that efforts to help employees manage chronic illness saved \$3.78 in health care costs for every \$1 spent. The lifestyle management programs helped a bit with absenteeism but had no significant effect on health care costs.



Financial Impact of Disease Management Programs

Understanding the problem is an important first step.

There's a good chance that many of your employees have at least one chronic illness. Or they help a family member who is dealing with a serious medical condition. More than [half of U.S. adults over age 18 have at least one chronic condition](#). And more than 25% have at least two conditions. Moreover, an estimated [29% of the U.S. adults serve as family caregivers](#) for an ill or disabled relative. Naturally, these challenges impact both work and home life.

According to a [2018 Milken Institute report](#), the total cost in the U.S. for direct health care treatment for chronic health conditions in 2016 totaled \$1.1 trillion. On top of that, the indirect costs of lost economic productivity totaled \$2.6 trillion.

And according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [high blood pressure, diabetes, smoking, physical inactivity, and obesity together cost US employers \\$36.4 billion a year](#) due to employees missing work.

Employees are Struggling More Than You Might Expect

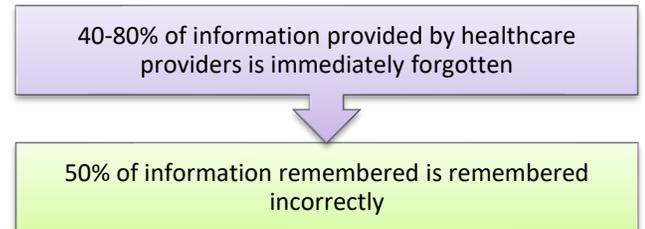
Everyone expects to be emotionally overwhelmed when dealing with a serious illness or injury. But most people don't realize how bad a job they are doing with the actual management of their medical condition. Managing a serious medical condition is overwhelming and hard work. The list of daily (and often hourly) considerations and to-dos is long. There is so much critical information of which to keep track. Are the medications being taken at the correct time? Am I asking the doctors the right questions? How should I decide the best course of treatment? "You don't know what you don't know" is an unfortunate reality when navigating the medical world.

Whether your employees are sick themselves or acting as a family caregiver for a loved one, the task is difficult and overwhelming. Employees may have to learn new medical terms, make difficult treatment decisions, and manage complicated medication and treatment routines – all while dealing with the stressors of a balancing their job, family and social life with the role of patient or caregiver.

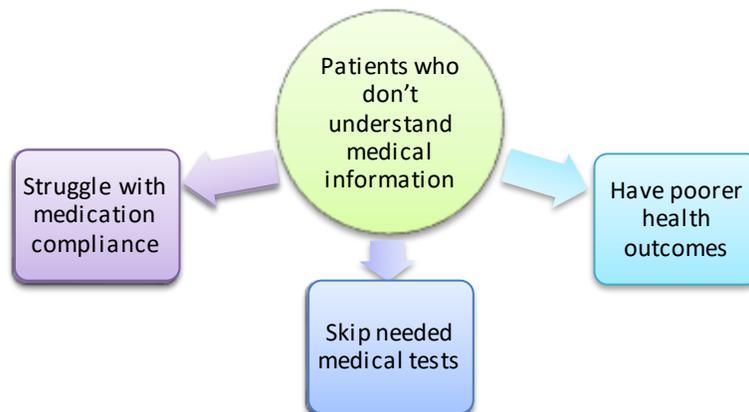
Not sure your employees are struggling? The proof is in the pudding.

Research has demonstrated that patients, and family caregivers, are struggling to be engaged, effective members of their medical teams.

A landmark [study found that 40-80% of medical information provided by healthcare professionals is forgotten](#) immediately; the more information presented, the lower the proportion remembered. Of the information that was remembered, almost 50% was remembered incorrectly.



Without clear understanding of medical information, patients are [more likely to be hospitalized, take medications improperly, skip needed tests, go to the ER more often, and have poorer health outcomes](#). What's making this even harder? Low health literacy rates. Health literacy, the ability to understand, process, and use health related information, impacts [about 88% of US adults](#).



People are struggling with medication regimens as well. Did you know that [over 50% of US adults don't take their medications](#) as prescribed? Being non-compliant with medication regimens, such as skipping or delaying doses, or taking the wrong dosage, [leads to thousands of adverse health events](#) or deaths every month in the U.S.

Engagement matters.

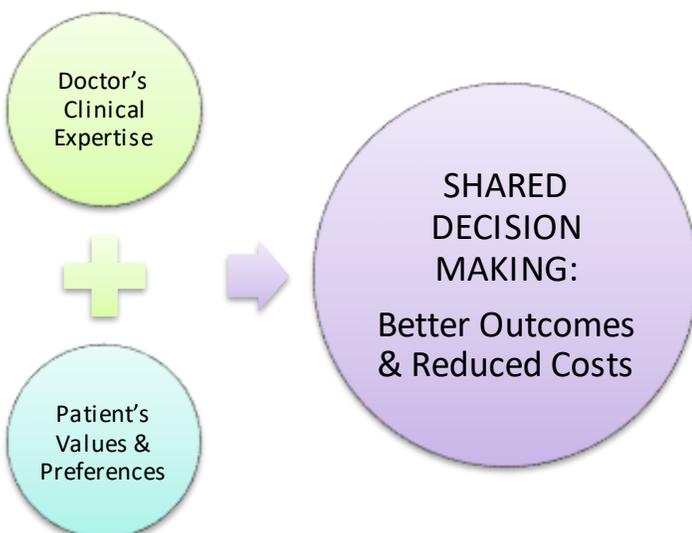
Of course, patients, family members, doctors and other medical professionals are all human, and humans make mistakes. It's important for patients to understand that doctors aren't perfect and can make mistakes, even when dealing with critically important, life and death situations. In fact, shockingly, medical errors are the [third leading cause of death](#) in the United States.

We also know that when patients are engaged in their care, they do better. [Studies show that effective communication](#) between the patient, and family caregiver and doctor leads to more appropriate medical decisions, better adherence to treatment plans and better health outcomes. Conversely, [research shows that patients less involved in their care are more likely to experience a medical error](#) in diagnosis or treatment plans and have poor care coordination.

For example, a physician [survey found that almost 1/3 of doctors](#) reported they had missed "alerts" for test results that had led to delays in patient care. Patients should not take the "no news is good news" approach when waiting for test results. Unfortunately, people often assume the best and don't know they should be following up.

Shared decision making – the collaboration between doctor and patient to make healthcare decisions together, considering not only clinical evidence, but the patient's

values and preferences – can [result in better health outcomes and reduced costs](#). When patients are actively engaged in decision making, they often make better decision about their own care and choose options they are more likely to adhere to.



Disease management programs work – shouldn't you be offering a robust program?

To help your employees best manage medical conditions, it is important to provide them with the tools they need to be fully engaged in the process. Disease management offerings can help you save money while helping your employees better manage a medical condition. These programs not only save money by reducing expenses associated with hospitalizations, ER visits, diagnostic errors, and other expenses incurred when patients are not fully involved in their care, the programs can also lead to savings related to improved employee productivity.

It's time to look at your disease management programs and see what improvements you can make. Your employees will thank you – and doing the right thing by them turns out to also be particularly good for business.

Zaggo can help.

Zaggo is national nonprofit organization dedicated to providing patients and their family caregivers with the information and tools they need to become empowered, engaged, effective members of their medical teams for the best possible care. With an easy-to-use guidebook and organizational tools necessary to keep healthcare information and documents accessible, the ZaggoCare System is the only product to offer the comprehensive advice and tools needed to help patients and caregivers manage illness or injury – and ultimately, receive the best possible care.



To learn more about how the ZaggoCare System can benefit both employers and employees, contact us at Roberta@ZaggoCare.org or 617-999-6415. For more information, visit www.zaggocare.org/employers.

