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RECENT EVENTS

Cancer Won't Wait for the Pandemic to End: Employer Strategies to Promote Timely Cancer Screening (February 23, 2021)

LVBCH and three other Pennsylvania health care coalitions hosted a webinar discussing the significant decline in cancer screening during the pandemic and what employers can do encourage employees to get screened.

Neil Goldfarb, President and CEO, Greater Philadelphia Business Coalition on Health, said 38% of all cancer deaths are from cancers that are potentially preventable through early detection and treatment. Screening can even identify pre-cancerous conditions, such as polyps that can be identified and removed during colonoscopy. Early detection greatly increases the likelihood of survival. For example, the five-year survival rate for non-small cell lung cancer is 63% when found early compared to 7% for a late stage diagnosis. Early diagnosis can also reduce treatment costs. When compared to Stage I breast cancer, treatment of breast cancer is 32% higher for Stage II, 95% higher for Stage III and 109% higher in Stage IV.

Ned Laubacher, Senior Advisor, Innovu, LLC, said that in an average year, 33-36% of Pennsylvania women age 40 and older received a screening mammogram but during the pandemic the number dropped to 25%, nearly a 10% drop. Similarly cervical cancer screening decreased from 21% to 13.6% and colorectal cancer, from 12 to 7.6% "These are alarming statistics when you pull back and really look at the access issues that COVID triggered," Laubacher said. Cancer disease doesn't stop just because we are not electing to go after screening exams or seeing our doctor for preventive visits. It's clear the diagnosis is continuing and the prevalence is not subsiding."

Kathy Makara, Evaluation Manager for the Pennsylvania Breast and Cervical Cancer Screening Program, Pennsylvania Department of Health, said not having enough time is a deterrent for many employees. She suggests bringing screenings on site or allowing them to use work time for preventive care. This also signals their importance.

Ginger Miller, Health Promotion Manager, Utz Quality Foods, said Utz opened an on-site medical clinic at its headquarters in Hanover, PA and sends employees screening reminders. Utz also covers the costs of diagnostic screenings and started a healthcare navigation program.

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Dr. Keith Boell, Chief Quality Officer, Population Initiatives, Geisinger Health said health care providers have worked hard to make sure their environments are as safe of possible but that some patients are still hesitant to get care. In addition, access remains a concern for some patient populations.

“The equity aspect cannot be understated,” Boell said. “The pandemic has affected everybody but we’ve seen that certain demographics or socioeconomic groups have been impacted differently. Rates have dropped more significantly for Medicaid patients and we have to come up with ways to help that population.”

In addition to LVBCH and the Philadelphia Business Coalition on Health, the event was sponsored by the Central Penn Business Group on Health, Pittsburgh Business Group on Health and Greater, Genentech and Pennsylvania Department of Health.