

# Understanding and managing your employees health risk profile

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Studies by Metropolitan AIDS Risk Consulting show that for HIV/AIDS alone, South African companies saved between 30% and 40% through Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) and antiretroviral programmes over the last three to four years.

The cost of HIV/AIDS related illnesses in the workplace dropped from around 4% to around 2,5% of payroll, with greater significance for companies employing 2000 or more employees.

Integrating data from medical schemes can give organisations a better understanding of the health risk profile of their staff - yet few South African companies use the data that is made available to them through their medical aid.

This is the view of Dr Ngubekhaya Gobinca, managing director of Qualsa, a leading managed health care company servicing more than 1.5 million medical scheme beneficiaries.

To date, employers have tended to address workplace health challenges on a very fragmented basis, with a diverse range of strategies and suppliers, focused on different aspects.

Most companies manage absenteeism in the workplace themselves, while HIV is managed by a managed care company without the integration of this data.

This creates what Mannini Radebe, Employee Assistance Programme leader at Qualsa@Work describes as a 'disjointed silo effect'.

"In order to combat this, we look at both the work and life balance of employees and encourage managers to take the lead in promoting pro-active lifestyle choices that support the prevention of illnesses," she says.

Launched earlier this year, Qualsa@Work offers holistic, integrated health risk management programmes that assist organisations in managing the health and wellness of their workforce.

"We don't want to wait until a problem manifests itself in the work place. We use our situational analysis to identify problems early. This enables companies to intervene to create a happier and more satisfied work force, which in turn will affect the bottom line," says Radebe.

Another Metropolitan study on a local company that introduced a comprehensive HIV/AIDS treatment programme in 2001 has revealed it to have reduced the cost of death benefits by 83% and disability benefits by 72% in 2005 alone.

"If leaders become champions of VCT for HIV, employee uptake can be increased dramatically and we can accelerate access to care, treatment and support," adds Ntombi Khambule, Qualsa@Work's VCT and Corporate Wellness manager.

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