Global Workplace Wellness: Healthy Employees, Healthy Business
I. Introduction

In recent years, global companies have shown growing commitment to their worksite-based employee wellness programs. Increasingly, they’re realizing that non-communicable diseases such as obesity, hypertension, and diabetes not only are seriously harming workforce health and raising medical costs, but also having a huge impact on workforce productivity around the globe. In 2011, the World Economic Forum projected the global economic burden of non-communicable diseases to climb to more than $40 trillion by 2029.¹

Wellness programs at the workplace also are being positively viewed by employees looking to improve their quality of life and level of wellbeing. Today’s workers look on their employers as a trusted source of more than just a paycheck, and they’re looking for more wellness program offerings that encourage healthy behavior.

In general, enthusiasm for wellness programs was high overall on the part of both employers and employees, across continents and cultures, but was not always backed up with concrete action by employers. Only those companies that proactively pursue systematic improvement of employee health, understand the needs of their dynamic workforce, and measure the usage and effectiveness of wellness programs can truly reap the rewards.

II. Employee Views of Health and Concerns About Productivity

On the surface, employers may not see a need to focus on health and wellness because their employees generally self-report themselves as healthy. More than 50 percent of employees surveyed in MetLife Employee Benefit Trends Study (EBTS) in the seven countries rated their own health as “good,” “very good,” or “excellent”:

- India 94%
- United Arab Emirates 92%
- Egypt 89%
- UK 83%
- Poland 77%
- China 69%
- Russia 52%

Quantitative and qualitative evidence, though, suggest the reality may not be quite so positive. In Poland, for example, half of employees rated their health as “good,” while a majority of the other half were divided equally between “very good” and “fair” or “poor.” And in Russia, roughly half (48 percent) of employees rated their health “fair” or “poor.” These findings were supported by an interviewed MNC with employees in both countries, and suggest that those workers, at least, may be more realistic about their actual health status than their counterparts in other countries. And an interviewed MNC in the UAE noted that the actual health status was not as good as self-reported by employees, consistent with what it found when comparing actual and self-reported fitness levels.

There appears a well-observed universal tendency for people to rate their own health as better than it actually is. There are as many unknown health risk factors in any given population as there are self-reported risks, so most data samples from self-reported surveys have displayed an upward bias in the actual health status of the survey population. Since a self-reported health status...
is a subjective measure, it must be supplemented with more objective measures — like biometrics from lab tests and physical measurements during worksite screenings — in order to draw accurate conclusions.

Employers should be mindful of how employee health affects productivity. With the exception of the United Kingdom, at least 40 percent of employees surveyed in five countries by MetLife strongly agreed or agreed they were worried that their health could negatively impact their ability to perform work:

- Russia 76%
- United Arab Emirates 53%
- India 50%
- Poland 40%
- United Kingdom 24%

The level of concern is high enough to suggest that many workers understand the connection between health and productivity — or “functional health” — perhaps better than their employers. This is the basis for the Health and Productivity Management Model developed by IHPM with its focus on “presenteeism,” or functional impairment. Employers that encourage employees to lead healthier lives — and offer the right set of benefits for that purpose — also may help improve the health of their businesses.

III. Communicating Well(ness) is Key

Employers and employees state their agreement on the importance of health and wellness benefits, but employees don’t necessarily get that sense from their employers’ actions – highlighting the need for better communication about available programs.

Looking at MetLife EBTS results from the seven countries surveyed, more than 80 percent of employers in each of the surveyed markets said that improving employee health and wellness was an important reason they offered benefits to their employees. The general perception among employees, however, was that employers were not doing enough to encourage healthy behaviors. With the exception of China and India, less than 50 percent of employees in the six countries surveyed said their employers offered wellness benefits and programs:

- China 84%
- India 66%
- United Arab Emirates 46%
- Russia 37%

EBTS survey respondents included employees at both large MNCs and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are less likely to bear the added cost of wellness benefits and programs. The MNCs interviewed by IHPM from its global network had the following reactions to the EBTS findings from the countries noted:

- **UK** – the MNC wondered if the low number of employees reporting access to wellness benefits and programs resulted from the inclusion of SMEs in the survey; large employers like this MNC are more invested in wellness because of the value it brings in employee loyalty and productivity.

- **Poland and Russia** — this MNC also commented on the low number of employees, wondering as well if this was due to the inclusion of SMEs in the survey; this MNC consistently offers wellness benefits and programs to its employees globally, and benchmarks against its own program to see what employees are using and what else they’re looking for.

- **India and UAE** — An interviewed MNC from each country was surprised by the high number of companies reported by their employees to be offering wellness benefits and programs, given the large number of SMEs in those countries. Regardless of company size, there appears to be a disconnect between the value that most employers say they place on wellness and what employees believe is being offered to them. **Companies that both offer and are able to properly communicate available wellness benefits and programs may stand to see increased employee participation, which in turn may lead to healthier lifestyles and, ultimately, a more productive workforce.**

IV. Employees Show High Satisfaction with their Wellness Programs

In a majority of the countries surveyed by MetLife — China, Poland, Russia, and the UAE — 80 percent or more of employers that said they offered wellness programs also reported satisfaction with the impact of these programs on their employees’ health. And 80 percent or more of employees who participated in these wellness programs across six surveyed markets — China, Egypt, India, Poland, Russia, and the UAE — agreed that the programs had a positive impact on their health.

Data from MetLife EBTS show much higher employee participation rates in wellness programs in China, Egypt and India than in the other four countries surveyed:
• China 69%
• Egypt 49%
• India 48%
• United Arab Emirates 32%
• Russia 22%
• United Kingdom 11%
• Poland 10%

Further data from India show that nearly one-quarter (22 percent) of employers reported participation rates of 75 percent or higher in their wellness programs, and another 37 percent reported rates of 50 to 74 percent — totaling an impressive 3/5 of employers with half or more of their employees participating in wellness. Some of this high participation may be due to incentives offered to 2/3 (68 percent) of employees surveyed. The interviewed MNC from India, though, achieves nearly 100 percent participation without offering any incentives, which may be attributable in large part to a strong corporate culture of health and high level of employee trust.

In other countries:
• UK – The interviewed MNC was not shocked by the low participation rate, noting its own challenge in getting engagement in general — and especially from its large contingent of middle-aged male workers.
• UAE – The interviewed MNC said participation varies widely by the type of program offered, and employees may think they’re “participating” when they receive information on wellness but don’t actually take part in on-site activities.

One thing made clear is that employees who participate in wellness programs are likelier to be those who have a better feeling about their own health. Data from the MetLife UAE EBTS showed that employees who rated their own health “good” or “excellent” had a participation rate of 45 percent, or more than three times the 13 percent rate of employees who said their health was “fair” or “poor.” This highlights the challenge of engaging unhealthier employees in these programs, even if they need them the most.

V. Employee Needs Should Guide Program Designs for Different Groups

Employers that use a “one-size-fits-all” approach to health and wellness may not be offering the program feature their employees are looking for. Across most countries surveyed in MetLife EBTS and companies interviewed, for example, participation in these programs generally was higher for older employees (age 51+) compared with the middle-aged heart of the workforce population (ages 31-50), with the exception of Poland.

In China, older workers put a higher value than millennials on wellness options, and expressed more satisfaction with the programs provided them.

Data from EBTS in Poland and the UAE on the demographics of employees choosing to participate in wellness programs offer a sharp contrast:
• In the UAE, participation rates were higher for older workers than for both millennials and the middle-age employee population (40 percent versus approximately 32 percent).
• Participation rates were dramatically lower for all age groups in Poland, but both millennials and older workers had lower participation rates than the middle-age employee population (less than 7 percent versus more than 10 percent).

Data on employees’ rating of their own health by demographic group were sharply different for China and Poland:
• In China, both the millennials and the older workers rated their health almost equally as “excellent” or “very good” (25 percent), while almost 35 percent of both groups rated their health as only “fair.”
• Data from Poland were more in line with expectations, with fewer than 10 percent of older workers rating their health as “very good” — far below the 40 percent rate for millennials and less than half the 24 percent rate of the middle-aged workforce population (ages 31-50).
• At the other end of the spectrum, 28 percent of older workers rated their health as only “fair” compared with 24 percent of employees age 31 to 50 and only 6 percent of millennials.

Employees of different ages in different countries also reported different health concerns. The top three concerns in Poland, for example, were exactly the same for younger and older workers: (1) cancer, (2) stress, and (3) heart disease. In China, the health concerns varied somewhat for these two groups: millennials ranked cancer and work/life balance equally as their top concern, followed by sedentary lifestyle and stress; older workers cited senility and cancer as their equal top concern, followed by roughly equal concern about high-blood pressure, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.

It is unlikely that employers realize cancer may be a top concern for young employees, or that some older employees may be more impacted by stress than expected. These findings suggest a need for employers to find better ways to engage their employees — particularly from these two important age groups representing the cultural continuity and the future of a company — in healthier behaviors.
VI. Better Health Can Mean More Engagement, Commitment and Performance

Quantitative and qualitative findings from the surveys and interviews both demonstrate a positive correlation between employees who were provided wellness program options and those who felt a strong sense of “engagement with their work” and “commitment to their employer.”

Results from MetLife’s China and India EBTS surveys showed a clear and strong correlation. If employees can raise the perceived level of value of their wellness programs for their employees — from “satisfied” to “very satisfied” — then employees’ level of commitment could rise by as much as 16 percent in China and 10 percent in India.

The chart below shows more data specific to India, comparing the percentage of employees who agreed with statements used to measure engagement with their work and commitment to their employers, depending on whether they did (yes) or didn’t (no) participate in wellness programs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feel loyalty to employer</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel company is a great place to work</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied with job that I have now</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An interviewed MNC in China concurred with the conclusion drawn from data collected in India, that participation in wellness programs seems to be associated with much higher levels of employee job satisfaction and much greater commitment to their employer. And limited data from China showed that millennials, in particular, viewed wellness programs as a strong driver of their engagement and commitment. Yet, surprisingly, these millennial employees were the least likely age group to feel like they were “bursting with energy at work” or to feel physically and mentally able to do their jobs.

In order to actually measure the impact of wellness benefits and programs, are used and ranked differently by the companies interviewed:

- **India** — The interviewed MNC tracks participation as a “process” measure and actual reductions in health risk factors over three to five years as an “outcomes” measure, to assure that improvements in employee health are being sustained — which its universal program does globally.
- **UAE** — The interviewed MNC uses a set of group wellness key performance indicators (KPIs) across the company, which are meant to align with its business objectives: (1) percentage reduction in medical claims, (2) percentage reduction in absenteeism, (3) percentage participation in “master events” such as the Dubai Marathon, and (4) employee survey scores. The company also has an overall KPI for its leadership team: the percentage of senior executives participating in the Executive Wellness Program.
- **UK** — The interviewed MNC tracks high-level KPIs across the business — sickness absence rates, disability and injury rates, and return-to-work rates of workers on disability — more than it does labor cost impact. The company does conduct a semi-annual survey of “perceived health,” with the question embedded in its wellbeing survey to establish a correlation between the two. Perhaps most notable is its sharp focus on mental health: the company updates a monthly “dashboard,” engaging both human resource directors and “workplace champions” with the goal of moving from stress to resilience and wellbeing. As the externally changing world of work increases psychosocial risk levels in the workplace, the company uses internal metrics to help it act to be more preventive rather than waiting to be corrective. And it measures the effectiveness of specific programs by doing actual pre- and post-case studies.
- **China** — The two interviewed MNCs measure success both in process terms (e.g., participation in wellness programs, levels of satisfaction with programs, and employees’ greater “sense of belonging”), as well as by outcomes like medical cost control, reduced sick leave, reduced health risk factors, and increased engagement levels.
- **Poland and Russia** — The interviewed MNC with operations in both countries analyzes labor cost impact as an outcomes measure of wellness program success for plant workers, though not for office employees. Employee satisfaction surveys are the process measure used, and are tracked over time by location and region, as well as company-wide. The company also uses a Health Risk Assessment as an evaluation tool to measure improvements in the workforce risk profile.

In addition to engagement and productivity, the more tailored a wellness program is to the assessed needs and interests of individual employees, the more profound...
impact it can have on employee retention. In general, there is an opportunity for improvement in this area, as, according to the MetLife EBTS, fewer than 60 percent of employees in China (59 percent), the UAE (38 percent), Russia (31 percent), Poland (21 percent), and the UK (17 percent) found their benefits compelling enough to make them want to stay with their current employers. So employers who track and measure the effectiveness of their wellness programs will be better able to identify wellness offerings that are working as well as those that aren’t, and to assess programs that may be worth including.

VII. Conclusion

Wellness benefits and programs are becoming increasingly important for employees around the globe and for their employers looking to create and maintain a workplace “culture of health” that also improves productivity. Employees are concerned about their personal wellbeing, as well as the impact of any health issues on their job performance. A targeted wellness program that addresses employee health concerns and is communicated effectively to them can be the way to bridge any gap between employers and employees in their wellness perceptions.

• Employers are well advised to supplement self-reported data with biometric data when assessing employee health. Those employees who self-report being in good health may be unaware of risk factors threatening their health status. Self-reported employee health information taken from Health Risk Assessments can be supplemented with clinical biometric data taken at worksite health screenings.

• Employers can build a compelling wellness program by understanding the health issues most impacting their employees. Decisions on program offerings then could make those employees likelier to participate — increasing engagement, commitment, and loyalty while improving health.

• Employers that use a mix of measures to gauge the impact of their wellness programs — like medical claims analyses, employee satisfaction surveys, program participation rates, and labor cost analyses — may realize the biggest and most immediate economic impact from reducing “presenteeism” to increase productivity. And they will be helping ensure the personal health and wellbeing of their most valuable asset — their human capital.

Where a healthy workplace culture does exist, employees are more likely to improve their health-related lifestyle behaviors and support each other in sustaining those positive changes over time. In addition, the more employees value these programs and participate in them, the bigger the potential payoff for employers in higher levels of engagement, commitment, and loyalty.

VIII. About the Report

IHPM’s Work Place Wellness Alliance evaluated the impact of wellness programs in the workplace — relying on survey findings from MetLife’s Employee Benefits Trends Studies along with a combination of testimonials from some of the leading Multi-National Companies in its global network and notable features of their well-regarded programs. For more than 13 years, MetLife’s EBTS studies have helped employers of all sizes from different industries understand how benefit offerings — including those related to wellness — can help them get greater returns from their benefits investments in the form of satisfied, skilled, and productive workers.

Collectively, the quantitative and qualitative results from this report provide a cross section of cultures and economies, as well as work force demographic and occupational profiles, from seven countries: China, Egypt, India, Poland, Russia, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom.

Five major questions were considered in drawing conclusions about the impact of workplace wellness on employee health, engagement and productivity:

1. How big is the gap between the value employers say they place on wellness benefits and programs, and what they actually provide to their employees?

2. While many employees say their employers do not offer wellness benefits and programs, how many of these employees actually participate in these programs when employers do offer them?

3. How satisfied are employers — and their employees — with the impact that wellness benefits and programs actually have on health?

4. What are the different ways employers measure results from wellness benefits and programs?

5. How differently do younger and older workers view the value of wellness benefits and programs, and what are their comparative participation rates in such programs?
About the Study
MetLife’s Employee Benefit Trends Study delivers timely and reliable research results that explore important benefits issues and evolving trends around the world. Building on more than a decade of research and experience in the U.S., as well as 11 additional markets since 2013, the Study provides fresh insights that can help employers get more from their benefits investments in the form of satisfied, skilled and productive workers. The Study also suggests tactics to help employees become more knowledgeable benefits consumers, leveraging insights from multiple markets in order to respond to the evolving benefits environment. The study design, involving both employer and employee surveys, was developed in the U.S. and has been adapted in key markets around the globe including: 2007 (Australia, Mexico, UK and India); 2011 (Australia, Brazil, India, Mexico, United Kingdom); 2013 (Brazil, Chile, Mexico); 2014 (United Arab Emirates, Poland, Russia); and 2015 (United Kingdom, India, Egypt, China).

MetLife Global Benefit Trends: benefittrends.metlife.com

About MetLife
MetLife, Inc. (NYSE: MET), through its subsidiaries and affiliates, is one of the largest life insurance companies in the world. Founded in 1868, MetLife is a global provider of life insurance, employee benefits, annuities, and asset management. MetLife is a leading provider of innovative employee benefits with employee benefits operations in more than 40 countries.

About Institute for Health and Productivity Management (IHPM) and WorkPlace Wellness Alliance (WPWA) | Advancing Health and Performance Globally | IHPM WPWA is a non-profit enterprise devoted to establishing the value of employee health as a global business asset. The core principle at the center of all of the Institute’s work is that health, well-being, and productivity are global issues impacting the success of companies and nations. IHPM provides data analyses, measurement tools, and HPM services and consultation to its members and clients in the United States, Latin America, Europe, Middle East and Asia. The Institute helps employers to identify the cost impact of employee health on business performance, choose the best programs to reduce this impact by improving health and productivity, and measure the success of their efforts. The institute is a unique driving force for changing health from a medical cost to a business asset for employers and nations. This unique status was recently acknowledged by the World Economic Forum when it chose IHPM as a partner for its global WorkPlace Wellness Alliance. The WorkPlace Wellness Alliance (WPWA) is a global group of multinational companies focused on transforming workplaces into environments that promote and sustain optimal health, well-being and performance.