

# Benefit Communication: Once a Year Is Not Enough

January 10, 2010

Whew, enrollment's over. We don't have to think about communicating benefits for another year, right? Not necessarily.

Here are five good reasons to focus on communication NOW.

**1 You anticipate major changes in your benefit program next year.**

If you know you are going to introduce new programs or benefits—such as consumer-driven health care plans or wellness initiatives—or if benefit reductions are on the horizon, now is the time to start preparing employees for upcoming changes. For example, if you know that employees' costs for health care coverage will likely be much higher next year, start communicating now about what the company is doing to hold down health care costs (and how employees can help) and what other organizations (and the government) are doing to address health care cost issues.

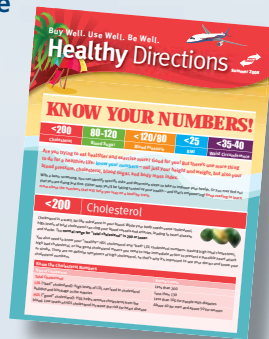
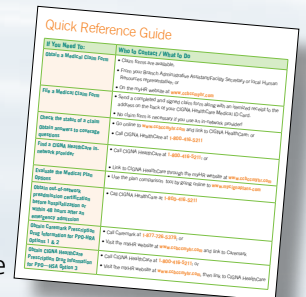
**2 You want to keep the focus on important initiatives.**

Let's say you introduced a new wellness program during enrollment. Keep the momentum going by focusing on healthy behaviors

throughout the year. Publish a wellness newsletter (in print and/or online). Provide links to resources and tools. Share employee success stories.

**3 Your online benefit information is... well...lacking.**

Many organizations have enrollment information online or have posted PDFs of summary plan descriptions, but is information organized to meet employees' needs? Now is a good time to develop and post value-added information online that employees can use. For example, provide a "how to" chart at the beginning of each benefit area that includes the most commonly searched for information such as "How to Find a Network Provider" or "How to File a Claim."



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**4 You don't have benefit information organized by life event.** Other than enrollment, the only time an employee is likely to search for benefit information is when they have a specific need—such as a specific medical issue or a significant life event (marriage, divorce, birth or adoption of a child, etc.). Communicating benefits by life event gives the “big picture” of how that event affects all benefits and other HR policies. Plus, employees will learn what steps they need to take (forms to complete, who to contact, etc.) and learn of other things they might consider (name change procedures, how to contact Social Security, etc.).



**5 You want to overhaul benefit communication (in print and/or online).** Is the design of your materials dated or bland? Do you want a new look for your intranet? Do you want to drive employees online for benefit information? Use this lead time to create and test design, organization, content, and messages. That way, when enrollment rolls around, you'll be ready to hit the ground running.

Just like pebbles  
thrown into a still lake,  
communication creates  
ripples that spread  
out endlessly.

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