

MEDICAL CALL CENTER NEWS

FROM ANSWER STAT MAGAZINE

Employee Trauma in the Medical Call Center: How You Can Help

By Army Alberts

You've just learned that a coworker at your call center has suffered a serious trauma in their personal life. The details made the local news the night before and further information concerning this individual was sent via email by the human resources department. The ensuing gossip around the water cooler led to a meeting with your manager and coworkers to discuss the current situation. Everyone in the call center has questions and concerns about this individual. *What really happened? What are they going through? Are they coming back to work?*

All of us experience, witness, or hear about trauma in our everyday lives – a death in the family, fire that destroys a home, natural disasters, or serious injury from a traffic accident. Trauma can also impact someone going through mental, physical, or emotional experiences over an extended period. Most medical call centers have documented processes and programs to deal with internal issues that affect call center personnel, and the human resource department works to provide assistance. However, while the steps to take might look great on paper, what will actually happen when that agent returns to the call center? What do you say upon your first encounter? When you see them from a distance, what will your initial reaction be?

Here are some suggestions:

- **Communicate:** If you know a coworker has been through a traumatic experience, the only wrong decision to make here is not communicating at all when they return to the call center. The affected individual will acknowledge the attempt, even though their own emotions may inhibit any sustainable response. The short list below provides a few types of communication media:
 - Verbal
 - Card/Ecard/Email/Written Letter
 - Phone Call
 - Warm Smile
- **Follow Your Heart:** Remember that this agent is the same person you knew before their trauma was disclosed. Be honest and sincere.
- **Find Facts:** Search the Internet for information about the type of trauma your coworker has endured. Gaining knowledge and understanding of what they went through, what they are currently going through, and what could happen to them in the future will help to eliminate fear of not knowing what to say.
- **Share an Experience:** Relaying a similar traumatic experience with a coworker will not relieve their problems, but it will provide some sense of hope for their future.
- **Listen /Don't Try Fixing:** Just listen. Let them talk and get any part of the story off their chest. Your colleague is probably not looking for suggestions for how to cope with what happened; they just want to make an earnest connection with you.

Individuals who have experienced trauma of some kind need the help of their coworkers when they return to work; uncomfortable or not, a compassionate conversation, a thoughtful card or email, or just a heartfelt smile can help your colleague get back into the call center routine.

To find more about Army Alberts, visit www.arnyalberts.com

Get Rid of Those Unwanted Pounds: Try the Liquidation Diet

By Dale Anderson, MD

The average person gains seven to ten pounds between Thanksgiving and Christmas. And according to a report in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, most people don't ever lose those holiday pounds. Repeat this cycle over a three-year period, and you could be carrying an additional thirty pounds.

Currently 60 percent of the U.S. population is overweight and 30 percent are obese. Being overweight has become a huge health problem for our country – a serious drain on our medical finances and work productivity. Additionally, those who are overweight die sooner. Think about it; how many overweight or obese people do you see in their 80s and 90s?

Extra pounds are often the behind-the-scenes culprit contributing to diabetes, hypertension, heart problems, fatigue, and muscle weakness. Too much weight contributes to most orthopedic problems, especially pain and stiffness in the back and lower extremities. Added to this is the fact that so many of us – medical call center employees included – spend our working hours hunched over our desks. Many agents overeat (or eat the wrong things) and don't make time for regular exercise.

The Liquidation Way of Life: Fortunately, there is an easy way to keep excess pounds off and lose the ones you've already accumulated. Quite simply, *stop drinking calories for thirst*. If you can spill it, don't swill it! By following this one simple rule, you will painlessly shed unwanted pounds.

Consider this: If you drink one eight-ounce glass of milk a day, you ingest the caloric equivalent of one "fat" pound each month – more than ten pounds in a year. The same holds true if you drink one can of sugared soda or one small glass of fruit juice a day. If you just stopped drinking these three items each day and made no other changes in your diet or exercise, you would drop over thirty-six pounds in a single year!

To make the most of the liquidation way of life, follow these guidelines:

- **H2O is the Way to Go:** Drink eight to sixteen glasses of calorie-free water every day. If you're overweight, your liquid calories should only come spoonful-by-spoonful as soup or on cereal, but never gulped from a glass, cup, can, or bottle.
- **Avoid "On-the-Go" Drinks:** Call center employees are a hard-working bunch. Many agents overlook the added calories of shakes and smoothies they consume as breakfast or lunch "on the go." Avoid beverages that act as a substitute for food, because they only provide a temporary feeling of having eaten. Within an hour or so, you'll be raiding vending machine, only adding more calories to your day.
- **Dilution Is the Solution:** If you just can't stomach drinking plain water, you can dilute any flavored drink – even diet soda – by at least 50 to 90 percent and still get the sweetness and taste you crave.
- **Make Time for Tea:** Tea comes in a multitude of flavors, from citrus to berry to herbs, meaning that you don't have to add any sweeteners to have a great taste.

Liquidation Is a Lifelong Investment: The real skinny on looking and feeling younger and more energetic is choosing a way of life that features whole grains, fruits, fish, lean meats, green veggies, and lots of water. Deprivation is not the answer. By making some simple, healthy choices about what you consume each day, you reduce your health risks, and you may even add five, ten, fifteen, or more productive and fruitful years to your life.

Dr. Dale Anderson is an author and speaker who practiced medicine for nearly fifty years as a family doctor, board-certified surgeon, and board-certified emergency physician. Contact him at 651-484-5162 or visit www.acthappy.com.

President Obama's Real Goal for Healthcare Reform

By Peter DeHaan



January marked a historical senate vote in Massachusetts of near epic proportions. Essentially, this became a referendum on the President Obama's first year in office in general and the healthcare debate in particular. The result of the contest did not bode well for our president. I wonder if he's listening, *really listening*, to what the people have said. What I do know is that his demeanor is more subdued, and he has lost a bit of his swagger.

In politics, our elected officials, including President Obama, have one of three primary goals, which becomes the focus for what they do and say:

1. Their job is to **serve the will of the people**.
2. Their goal is **be reelected**.
3. Their intent is to **advance an ideology**.

They can't do all three; ultimately, only one will be their true and overarching focus. That means:

1. If President Obama views his real job as **servicing the people**, he will respond to their message and do an about-face on healthcare. He may not drop it completely, but at the very least, he will reverse course, providing what the people want.
2. If President Obama's true goal is to **be reelected**, he will distance himself from this hot potato in order to avoid committing political suicide.
3. If President Obama's genuine intent is to **advance an ideology**, then he will doggedly stay the course.

I suspect we will likely see him continue his unrelenting push for a healthcare overhaul – even if it's not what the majority want or if renders him a one-term president.

Parkland Health Improves Care, Cuts Costs with Unified Communications

Parkland Health & Hospital System recently implemented a unified communications solution from Amcom Software, Inc., that has enabled them to enhance patient care through creative uses of technology, which in turn has reduced costs. The Dallas-based organization also uses integrated Amcom solutions for its contact center operations, Web-based employee directory, on-call scheduling, and emergency notification.

Round-the-clock agents field more than one million internal and external calls annually, including requests to activate critical medical and nonmedical notifications throughout the organization. The tight process developed for Heart Cath Team activations has notably reduced the hospital's treatment time for heart attack patients (door-to-balloon time). The efficient use of the technology has helped Parkland achieve recent accreditation as a primary stroke center.

The system's emergency notification capabilities have also helped Parkland send alerts to key groups outside the hospital for time-sensitive situations. This has included notifying staff at the nearby children's hospital of incoming critical patients.

Internally, Parkland's 8,000 employees have come to rely on the system's Web-based employee directory and on-call schedules, which logged 2.5 million hits since 2005. Together, these efficiencies have generated ROI for Parkland in the form of reduced workload for the contact center.

Nurse Practitioner Conference to Cover Clinical Care and Health Reform

This year's national conference for nurse practitioners, the Conference for Primary and Acute Care Clinicians, which provides workshops and sessions for nurses, will be held May 19-22, 2010, at the Hyatt Regency Chicago, in Chicago, Illinois. The conference is sponsored by *The Nurse Practitioner* journal, a Wolters Kluwer Health publication that provides information and business intelligence for students, professionals, and institutions in medicine, nursing, allied health, and pharmacy.

The conference is designed for nurse practitioners and advanced practice clinicians practicing in primary and acute care settings. Attendees will participate in hands-on workshops on such topics as suturing and orthopedic splinting and attend educational sessions on pharmacogenetics, heart failure, and skin cancer. Participants will earn continuing nursing education (CNE) contact hours and pharmacology credits, enjoy networking and special events, meet with vendors in the exhibit hall, and view poster presentations.

For registration information, visit www.ncnpconference.com.

CPM Marketing Group Gained Strong Momentum in 2009

CPM Marketing Group Inc., a provider of healthcare customer relationship management (CRM) and strategic marketing solutions, announced that it experienced one of its most successful years in 2009. This success was underscored by launching new CRM products and services, winning fifteen national and international awards for healthcare marketing initiatives, purchasing a larger corporate headquarters, opening a call center, expanding its workforce, and boosting its community involvement.

CPM's new call center supports inbound and outbound call marketing services for hospitals and health systems. Inbound campaign services include class registration, event registration, and physician referral communication. Outbound services include new city movers recruitment, market research, customer surveys, and appointment reminders. The call center uses behavioral targeting technology to enable CPM's agents to tailor phone call communication based on individuals' past and present medical indications or their risk for developing future conditions.

FCC Pushing Telemedicine in Upcoming National Broadband Plan

The Federal Communications Commission is readying its national broadband strategy to present to Congress on March 17, 2010, and it will highlight the need for broadband to support telemedicine, reports Alice Lipowicz of Federal Computer Week.

"The commission recommended that federal authorities expand reimbursement for telemedicine and other e-health care; conduct pilot projects; deliver a plan to Congress on how to advance telemedicine and health information technology; and clarify regulatory requirements, licensing, and credentialing," she stated. "The FCC also recommended that the federal government work to expand interoperability between clinical, research, and administrative health care data and to make sure that patients have access to their own health data." The FCC asserts that electronic health records could save \$513 billion over fifteen years.

Poll Confirms One of Four Healthcare Dollars Spent on Unnecessary Care

One in four dollars spent on healthcare in America pays for unnecessary tests and treatments that physicians order to keep from being sued, according to a new Gallup poll of the nation's doctors released by Jackson Healthcare and the Center for Health Transformation. The poll, conducted by Gallup for Jackson Healthcare, showed that of physicians surveyed nationwide, 73 percent said that they had practiced some form of "defensive medicine" in the past twelve months to protect themselves from frivolous lawsuits.

That means that patients are paying more so doctors won't be sued. "Healthcare would be cheaper for every American if we could slash the cost of defensive medicine," said Newt Gingrich, founder of the Center for Health Transformation. "Think of how often each of us gets sent for extra lab work or tests that seem so unnecessary. Meaningful health reform must address these unnecessary costs."

Gallup conducted the six-week, nationwide survey across all specialties of physicians. Those doctors reported that 26 percent of overall healthcare costs can be attributed to the practice of defensive medicine. According to just-released data by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, healthcare in America now costs \$2.5 trillion annually.

Additionally, in a recent online poll by Jackson Healthcare, 64 percent of Texas physicians report that tort reform measures (enacted in 2003 in Texas) have not decreased their defensive medicine practices. According to Jackson Healthcare chairman and chief executive officer Richard Jackson, "We need a balanced, commonsense approach that guarantees patients their rights without undermining their care."