



Employee Benefits

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Healthcare's Personal Advocate

By: Robert H. West, RHU

"When it comes to healthcare or health insurance everyone has a story! And generally, these stories are not happy ones."

As brokers and consultants, we are constantly faced with the issue of assisting our clients in navigating the world of healthcare benefits and costs. Nevertheless, that challenge is escalating as we are faced with insurance companies reducing staff and the implementation of HIPAA. To maintain our position of relevancy for our clients, we are being asked to perform more services for our clients.

Even small and mid-size clients are regularly asking about on-line components and call center capability, so the question becomes how do you distinguish your firm?

Employee Advocacy

About fifteen months ago, our firm became aware of an organization called Health Advocate (www.healthadvocate.net), an organization founded to be the employee's advocate through the complexity of our healthcare system. Ironically, several former managed care executives founded Health Advocate, but we have found their experience and industry contacts have enhanced their capabilities.

As brokers and consultants, we continue to encourage our clients to have employees contact our offices if they have claim problems – our firm even has an LPN to assist those calls. Unfortunately, there are significant medical problems that develop that most employees and brokers are not capable of handling in a timely or efficient manner. That is where we have had success partnering with Health Advocate. An example follows:

In early 2003, an employee whose newborn daughter required a special feeding

formula that cost \$800 per month due to a medical condition contacted us. The employee's pediatrician had contacted the insurance carrier and their request had not been processed since the insurance carrier did not have a written policy for this medical condition and medication. After discussing the situation with the employee our firm contracted Health Advocate who resolved the claim favorably for the employee within thirty days.

While I firmly believe that our agency could have ultimately resolved this claim favorably through the carrier's appeal process, it would not have occurred as quickly and that was the advantage of the Health Advocate service. Their Personal Health Advocates (PHA) assigned to these types of issues are RN's supported by a Medical Director.

What Does This Mean?

Health Advocate is available to employers on a per employee basis and is sold through brokers and consultants, so when should you consider such a service?

1. For smaller firms that are fully insured, it can be a differentiating factor between you and your competition.
2. For self-insured plans or large fully insured plans, Health Advocate can develop a ROI of financial savings in areas from lost productivity, reduced medical claims and perhaps improved discounts.

This is just one example of what this vendor can do to help the broker consultant assist their client. Other areas include eldercare issues, center of excellence, HIPAA compliance, etc. However, probably the best endorsement I can suggest for Health Advocate is that we purchased it for our firm's employees.

Robert H. West, RHU is President of Karr Barth Benefits Group, Inc. that is located in the suburbs of Philadelphia, PA.

A Babson College graduate, he has worked in the insurance industry since 1975. KBBG is an employee benefits firm that was originally founded in 1990.

Bob can be reached at robertw@kbbg.com or 610-660-4630.