

Workplaces that care

Companies are now promoting mandatory corporate wellness programmes that are tailored to suit each individual's needs

BY RAJIV DOGRA

Gaurav Bhandari, a Mumbai-based IT professional, is content with the work-life balance he has been able to achieve thanks to his company's wellness programme. Constant work-related travels across India and a sedentary lifestyle coupled with night shifts were taking a toll on his health. With the encouragement and help of his company, he moved a lot closer to his workplace. "Today, my office is just a walk away from home at Airoli in Navi Mumbai, so no long hour travels to work. My body mass index (BMI) is under check. Besides, I am able to spend quality time with my wife and daughters," says Bhandari.

Bhandari, 38, represents the archetypal corporate employee who was facing the rigours of a hectic work schedule that drained him physically, mentally and psychologically a few years ago. However, corporates are increasingly chalking out wellness programmes for their employees that are 'need and evidence-based', as they are beginning to see how it could influence the profitability index graph in the long term.

Holistic as the buzzword

A full-fledged gym, meditation sessions, customised food menu in office canteens, flexible work hours and a preventive health package remain a given as part of a company's wellness initiative. However, a key difference between the approach a few years ago and now is the shift from being voluntary health offerings to the mandatory introduction of holistic wellness programmes.

"We believe health is no longer only the responsibility of particular functions of an organisation. Instead, it is an integrated part of

a company's strategy, governance and operational framework, underpinned by tailored and targeted interventions to assessed need and engagement—both at an individual and employer level," says Sailesh Shetty, vice-president, Toyota Kirloskar Motor Pvt Ltd.

The evolution of a healthy workplace at Toyota Kirloskar comprises four levels. For example, the first level focuses on sports, the second level stresses on exercise and fitness, the third level identifies and prevents health risk factors, and the fourth level focuses on enhancement of health and productivity. A tailor-made Art of Living programme, as well as a 24x7 free counselling service known as 'Aasare' to provide emotional support to workers on personal and workplace issues, stress management through occupational health management (OHA), obesity and overweight prevention programmes called 'Lean works' are some of the initiatives that are practised regularly through plan, do check and action (PDCA). In addition, specific health programmes are designed to suit the needs of different employee lifecycles considering their advancing age factor.

The wellness programmes are also more holistic than before and also include employee engagement which can affect health. For instance, more companies are realising that presenteeism is a larger issue than the impact of absenteeism on the workplace. Ideally, presenteeism is defined as the practice of coming to work despite illness, injury or other distress, often resulting in reduced productivity. "About five years ago, we introduced flexi work timings wherein an employee needs to be present in the office only between 11am and 4pm and can



Wellness facts

- ❖ Adoption of corporate wellness programme could save the corporate companies in India an income up to US\$ 20 billion in 2018 alone through a reduction in absenteeism by 1 per cent, according to a paper released by ASSOCHAM earlier this year
- ❖ A survey by Cigna TTK Health Insurance, a joint venture between US-based Cigna Corp. and Indian conglomerate TTK Group, states that about 89 per cent of the population respondents in India mentioned that they were suffering from stress compared to the global average of 86 per cent
- ❖ Employees opting for a more personalised approach to their well-being experiences is one of most popular corporate wellness trends of 2018
- ❖ Data collected from the usage of digital platforms, fitness apps and wearable wrist bands are helping companies to streamline their programmes

Khushpreet Singh Oberoi, head, wellness, Religare Health Insurance, adding that the company caters to 150-odd corporates pan India.

choose to come early and leave soon or walk in late and go back home accordingly. Besides, an employee has been given the flexibility to operate from any of the offices that are close to their home. In addition, an employee can choose to work from home two days in a month," says Lancelot Cutinha, head-human resources, Mahindra Lifespace Developers Ltd. Moreover, the company has also relooked at the number of maternity leaves being extended. It now provides 40 weeks of maternity leaves, which includes four weeks of part-time work as well. Similarly, paternity leaves are also now provided at Mahindra & Mahindra group, which operates in 12 key business sectors.

Moreover, a company-sponsored wellness programme also underlines savings for an employee. A mandatory Zumba session every Friday, discounted gym memberships, interactive team offsites are some of the initiatives introduced by New Delhi-based IPE Global Ltd, which is an international development consulting group providing expert technical assistance and solutions to help developing countries

achieve sustainable development goals (SDGs). "As employees spend an average of 40 hours a week in the office, we are also in the process of initiating a 20-minute yoga session which will include meditation and breathing exercises before the start of the day to rejuvenate the employee energy levels. What differentiates us is the fact that there is no employee age bar for joining in any of the activities here," says Tanya Singh, director, IPE Global Ltd.

Apart for deploying these corporate wellness programmes for its employees, the companies are extending it to their immediate families as well. "While adopting an evidence-based approach, anything we have launched as part of a wellness initiative, we have practised it in-house with our team members, colleagues and their families. For instance, a flu vaccination camp is one of the activities we have been undertaking for our employees for the past five years. We have been promoting employees to prompt their families to participate in these vaccination programmes as well," says Gurugram-based Dr

Keeping tab

In the long run, sustainability of a particular wellness programme poses a challenge, but companies have evolved their own methods of 'checks and balances'. "We have a health troika, which has representatives from every sector in our system for the entire group that meets every month. Also, we have an engagement survey which has a specific question on well-being, including mental, physical and psychological. We also monitor the ratings. Based on the feedback, we do the action planning to check on how well we are doing on this particular question. However, the answers may vary from location to location. Accordingly, we tweak the wellness programme to cater to the needs. For instance, we discontinued stepathon after taking a feedback from our employees," says Cutinha.

Similarly, the health and wellness programmes are monitored and reviewed with metrics at Toyota Kirloskar, which includes but is not limited to participation rate, health status, health risks, employee satisfaction and morale, sick leave and disability, cost saving and benefits evaluation with

return on investment (ROI), value of investment (VOI) and health-related productivity study.

"Workers and their representatives are actively involved in the process from planning to evaluation and have collective means of expression to a stronger extent than that of individual workers through forums and committees," says Shetty.

Similarly, at IPE Global Ltd, certifications are given to employees who have been regularly a part of the wellness programmes in the company for at least a month. "At times, we also give away a thank-you card, and mementoes to recognise their efforts across the company," says Singh.

According to Oberoi, the company promotes health camps, out-patient department (OPD) and in-patient department (IPD) services to their employees. "We look into the data which comes in through these health camps, we look at our OPD and IPD claims for our employees. After looking at the demographics, we create a tailored programme which is launched at the start of a financial year itself. The

calendar is panned over the year which would have activities, including screening of all diseases, creating awareness through health talks, among others. We also conduct various activities around fitness, including Zumba, yoga sessions, just to list a few. The inclination towards wellness programmes for us is as important for our internal employees as for our corporate customers that remains one of the main factors that our corporate customers have a long-standing affinity with our brand," he says, adding that the company launched an internal social media initiative in 2018 wherein they created a group on an app where all their employees share their fitness activities on a regular basis, which serves as a motivator for others to follow.

From new ways to monitor health, to encouraging healthy eating and exercise to looking after the emotional needs of employees, companies are going all out to ensure their employees are comfortable and happy. And HR managers believe such initiatives are only going to increase in the coming year. □