



LVBCH PRESIDENT CARL SEITZ PARTICIPATES IN LEHIGH VALLEY BUSINESS HEALTH CARE SYMPOSIUM PANEL DISCUSSION

LVBCH President Carl Seitz asked webinar viewers to consider whether the dramatic drop in healthcare services during the COVID-19 pandemic might indicate that some of the care provided during typical times is unnecessary or of low value. Seitz participated in a Lehigh Valley Business Health Care Symposium webinar, *Trends in Healthcare for Employers*. Other panelists in the August 6th webinar sponsored by Highmark BlueCross and Populytics were: Carolyn Lamparella, Program Director, Preferred EAP; John Lufburrow, Vice President, Eastern PA Commercial Markets, Highmark Inc.; and Amy Nyberg, President, Coordinated Health/Lehigh Valley Health Network.

The pandemic has exposed healthcare systems to economic distress for the first time, Seitz said. For instance, the bottom dropped out of the urgent care market. Those patients didn't shift to another location, rather they seemed to have disappeared. "Is this an opportunity to look at unnecessary or low value care," Seitz asked. "Is the right care being provided in the right location to the right people."

Lufburrow said Highmark saw a dramatic dip in the number of people getting hands-on care during the spring and summer, which will have a long-term impact. Meanwhile there was a substantial increase in the number of people who had virtual visits for which they were satisfied. "In many ways, that's a silver lining."

The development of virtual visits has transformed the health care industry and has been especially beneficial for behavioral health patients, Lamparella said. Virtual visits, which have developed practically overnight, have improved access and reduced the number of missed appointments as patients have found it easier to connect with a therapist. In addition, employee assistance programs (EAPs) have found that more people are choosing telephone visits over in-person ones. They can talk with a therapist while they go for a walk or sit in their car. "People are resilient and don't need a lot, just a few minutes," she said. "They just want to know that we're there and that somebody cares."

Stress resulting from months of the pandemic, economic downturn and being in a state of hyper vigilance has had a cumulative effect on employees as they are experiencing constant change in routine and uncertainty about the future, she added. Lamparella urged leaders to encourage people to talk about mental health. Lufburrow suggested employers continue to market the availability of the EAP services, noting that virtual visits are often the clinically appropriate option.

Nyberg alluded to the fact that some employees, such as essential workers, are working longer hours under more stressful situations. In such cases, it's important for employers to frequently check in to gauge their team's resilience. "Ask, how are you doing and really mean it," she suggested.

Seitz shared the results of a recent survey of 1,200 employees that showed that 40% of the respondents didn't believe that their employers really care about their mental health beyond how it affects productivity,

The [survey](#) conducted by the National Alliance of Healthcare Purchasers and Lyra Health, a provider of employer-sponsored mental and emotional health care benefits, also showed that 47% of those surveyed said they hadn't heard from their employers about either the economic situation or the recent race-related protests and unrest.

Lamparella said mental health is a difficult area for employers to navigate because most employers don't want to overstep. Employers want to know how to approach mental health issues in a way that is supportive and respectful of the employee's privacy.

In regard to transitioning employees who have been working from home back to work, Lufburrow suggested that to reduce worker stress, employers should have a return plan that is phased in over many months, if possible.

For additional information, please contact: LVBCH at LVBCH@LVBCH.com or call us at 610-317-0130.

60 West Broad St. • Suite 306 • Bethlehem, PA 18018 • P: 610-317-0130

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