



Fargo Moorhead

Chamber of Commerce  
of Fargo Moorhead

(202 First Avenue  
North, Moorhead)

P.O. Box 2443  
Fargo, ND  
58108-2443  
218.233.1100  
Fax 218.233.1200

[www.fmchamber.com](http://www.fmchamber.com)  
info@fmchamber.com

## *Why Employers Should Embrace Wellness Programs*

“A stitch in time saves nine.” “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” These old adages are even more applicable today, especially when it comes to healthcare, an individual’s health and the relationship between employers and their employees. The simple fact is this: Americans, in general, are getting unhealthier and it’s costing all of us, especially businesses who supply a great deal of the health insurance. Several factors are creating the “perfect storm” that is driving insurance rates up at three times the rate of inflation.

Factor #1: Sedentary work (i.e. sitting at a computer for a good part of the day) is a byproduct of the information age. We can’t really change it. The problem is, the human body’s genes are incompatible with this type of work. Our genes are congruent with movement and exertion, proper nutrition and positive thinking. Today’s workers face long hours of sitting, mental stress and food on the go that is often less than nutritious. Add to that the over-consumption of soda pop and caffeine and you get a population that, according to experts, will be 75 percent overweight by 2015. We are simply not built to sit all day and get little exercise.

Factor #2: It’s cheaper to eat unhealthy food compared to healthy food. It’s tough to compete with a fast food value meal or \$5 pizza compared to an \$8-\$10 salad. Trust me, getting more fries and pop for 30 cents is not a real value when you look at the long term health consequences. We’re seeing arteriosclerosis in teenagers from fast food, children with brittle bones from pop consumption and obesity rates that continue to climb every year. Americans now rank 42nd in life expectancy compared to the rest of the world. (Please watch “Super-Size Me” for a real eye-opener.)

Factor #3: The rising cost of sickness care, not healthcare like we really need. We are paying through the nose for drugs and surgeries that are designed to treat the effects of poor lifestyle choices. You see, 75 to 80 percent of all chronic illnesses are caused by poor lifestyle choices. Certain types of cancers, obesity, Type II Diabetes, heart disease, stroke, high cholesterol and high blood pressure are all driven by bad choices. It’s not our genes’ fault as our genes express only what we provide our bodies with for raw materials in the foods we eat and the level of exercise we engage in.

Within the rising cost of sickness care is the pharmaceutical industry. The pharmaceutical drug lobby in Washington, which has two lobbyists for every single member of Congress, has been successful at driving legislation that will ensure a solid return on investments for their stockholders for many years to come. Since 1996, direct to consumer advertising has fueled unprecedented demand for expensive prescription drugs. Dr. **John Abramson**, a family physician and author of “Overdosed America,” clearly describes the drug industries’ effects on our culture and the costs being transferred to our business community and citizens. We have the finest medical technology and physicians



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anywhere in the world and medications that save people's lives everyday. We also have an industry that has leveraged its way into America's wallet, dominates every form of media through its advertising and enjoys government subsidy like no other. And the worse part is, it's not making us healthier! We rank 37 out of 38 industrialized countries when it comes to health status. The bottom line is this: There is no drug or surgery that will ever take the place of healthy lifestyle choices.

Here's where wellness comes in. Wellness programs can educate and inspire businesses to help employees make better choices. When supported by management, wellness education and strategies can have a powerfully positive effect on: increasing productivity, reducing absenteeism, improving retention and ultimately lowering costs. Why can't we as business leaders seek to model a better way to address the threats to our personal and financial health by being proactive instead of reactive when it comes to wellness? We can't continue doing the same things we've done for years now. Let's turn this tanker around and start taking responsibility for our own health and the health of our employees together. Everybody wins.

Dr. Mike Jorgensen is the owner of Jorgensen Chiropractic, a Chamber member since July 2007. For more information on how to implement a wellness program, feel free to contact him at 701.235.2700.