

---

**CRAIN'S**  
**CLEVELAND**  
**BUSINESS****HEALTH CARE: ELDER CARE**

## Firms mull ways to handle sandwich generation demands

*Productivity can be issue as workers care for young and old*

By **DAVID PRIZINSKY**

4:30 am, March 17, 2008

It's known as the sandwich generation. These are the people who are caring for older family members as well as young children, and the generation's rise is creating some pressure on businesses to come up with policies that recognize and address elder care.

Although some human resources surveys have indicated as many as 40% of workers will have to care for an older person during the next few years, many companies still are in the early stages of gearing up for the demands that the sandwich generation will make on the workplace.

"Twenty years ago, elder care didn't come up," said Mark Sutherland, director of investor relations for Wickliffe-based Lubrizol Corp. "Now we know about the sandwich generation."

Lubrizol, which has 3,600 employees in North America, offers a long-term care insurance plan to employees that can cover an older parent. This plan is offered to employees at a discounted group rate and covers such things as nursing home care, said Suzanne Suva, Lubrizol's benefits manager.

Ms. Suva said the number of employees who have signed up for the insurance plan is small.

"People find ways of dealing with the issue," she said. "I haven't seen any disruptions to the business because of the elder care situations."

However, disruptions and lost productivity are bound to occur.

The Employers Resource Council in Mayfield Village reported that a survey of 61 area organizations and companies conducted last summer indicated that 54% observed changes in employee productivity "stemming from obligations to elderly relatives." The survey didn't identify the companies or measure the changes.

ERC said 84% of the survey respondents said employees have asked for some time off to care for or assist an elderly relative.

However, the survey also said 75% don't offer extra time off to employees to deal specifically with elder care issues. Those asking for time off were told by their managers to use sick days, vacation days or such things as floating holidays to conduct their elder care business.

## Just plain 'family-friendly'

While studies abound, it can be difficult to separate policies that benefit a caregiver from other workplace policies, such as tele-commuting or flexible time —policies that can be used for a variety of reasons, including elder care. Many benefit programs are simply referred to as “family-friendly.”

Indeed, one survey of 323 companies done early last year by the Society for Human Resource Management in Alexandria, Va., indicated that only 7% of respondents had a separate and distinct elder care policy that could be distinguished from such benefits as unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act.

Heather Phillips, a spokeswoman for the Cleveland Clinic, said the 37,000-employee hospital and health care system offers a long-term care insurance policy and flexible spending accounts that can be used to cover elder care expenses.

The Clinic also provides counseling and other elder care benefits such as nursing home referrals.

However, she said the primary tool is the 12 weeks of unpaid leave that an employee can take under the provisions of the Family Medical and Leave Act.

Judi Braswell, director of education and training for Behavioral Health Systems Inc., said that employee assistance programs are growing in popularity in corporate America as an effective way of dealing with the stress that can often accompany elder care.

EAPs developed by Behavioral Health Systems include searchable databases for elder care services along with in-depth employee counseling and therapy.

“In the next five years, elder care will be the main issue for EAPs,” said Ms. Braswell, whose Alabama-based company has worked with several Cleveland-area firms.

While some large companies offer elder care benefits, smaller firms are more likely to be cautious because of costs and the need to remain competitive.

At Avtron Manufacturing Inc. in Independence, for example, there is no specific elder care policy, but company president Robert Fritz said it is not a “burning issue” at his firm.

He said his workers understand that Avtron, which employs 450 at several area plants, does all it can to be fair to employees and that it must offer competitive wages and benefits if it is to retain its work force.

Even so, smaller companies — like Avtron — often have the flexibility to accommodate legitimate employee concerns if need be, even though the law may not require it.

But, Mr. Fritz said, “You have to be careful that you don’t show favoritism.”

---

PRINTED FROM: <http://www.crainscleveland.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080317/FREE/687365253&template=printart>

© 2009 Crain Communications Inc.

---