

Benefits Buzz

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DID YOU KNOW

The IRS recently released guidance regarding the Affordable Care Act's \$2,500 contribution limit for health FSAs. Here are some of the key points:

- IRS clarified that the limit does not apply for any plan years that begin before 2013.
- Employees may only contribute \$2,500 to a health FSA, regardless of whether family members also benefit from those funds.
- The limit only applies to health FSA contributions, not to other employer contributions.

Contact Deutsch & Associates, LLC for more information.



Educate Employees on Varying Health Care Costs

It is no secret in the health care industry that prices can vary widely. From city to city, hospital to hospital and doctor to doctor, the price for procedures and tests can fluctuate by thousands of dollars.

Though the wide range of costs is common knowledge within the industry, employees are largely unaware that these price discrepancies occur even within the same network. Though recent stories of individuals being saddled with more than \$400,000 in medical bills are certainly not the norm, they shed a light on the importance of employee education regarding price disparities. Here are a few ways you can help your employees become better consumers of health care:

- Educate staff on the wide range of health care costs. When they are aware of these differences, your employees will be encouraged to shop around to get the best price

possible. Consider referring them to a resource that provides the average cost of common procedures, such as www.healthcarebluebook.com.

- Make sure your employees know what to be on the lookout for when it comes to health care costs. For example, many unexpected bills are a result of employees not fully understanding all the implications of seeing an out-of-network provider.
- Be sure to inform employees that the price of most procedures and tests are negotiable, both before and after they have been performed. It is best to negotiate with a provider prior to receiving care, but some doctors may lower their rate if asked after a procedure—especially if it was an emergency service.

Now that summer has finally arrived, many employers are starting to see a familiar pattern reappear. Employees arrive at the office and promptly get to work, but by the late afternoon they are gazing out the windows and productivity has plummeted—especially on Fridays.

To counter the dog days of summer, many employers have turned to flexible scheduling. This practice allows employees to choose the times they work, as long as they put in the required 40 hours a week.

Under a flexible scheduling policy, employers usually set mandatory work hours, for example 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., but employees are able to work longer on some days and leave early on others. This allows for personal appointments and family events while still ensuring that the hours put in at the office are productive ones.

Consider implementing a flexible schedule to maximize employee productivity and offer staff a positive work-life balance.