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Case Study #3: Communicating Benefit Plan Changes that Require More Employee Out-of-Pocket Costs.

Client:	A large, regional, multi-sited hospital system.
Assignment:	Create an all-encompassing, unified communications approach, complete with long-term and short-term strategies and tactics.
Challenges:	Culturally, educationally and economically diverse audience. Client's inexperience with other than carrier-provided communication.

"The speed at which the materials were turned around, the quality of the writing and design and the customer service were truly astounding!"

VP of Human Resources
Regional Hospital Chain

This organization was making significant changes to most of their major benefit plans. Some of the changes were negative (re-establishing 85%/15% coinsurance for in-network care, higher out-of-pocket maximums, a new formulary for prescription drug benefits, etc.) and some were positive (higher benefits for out-of-network care, higher lifetime maximum benefit and increased 401(k) match).

The organization had **never** communicated the employee benefits program in any sort of a cohesive manner. Benefits communication had simply been a wide variety of carrier/vendor produced SPDs, contracts and certificates of coverage. Employees did not understand – nor did they appreciate – the benefits program.

BeneCom was retained to develop and implement a short- and long-term strategic approach for communicating benefits and create a theme/logo specifically for benefits and other HR programs. The primary objective was to help employees understand the rationale for their higher out-of-pocket costs, recognize the true value of their benefits program, and reveal the "hidden paycheck" story.

We teamed up with their marketing department to develop the benefits logo and theme ensuring consistency with the new organizational logo that was being rolled out to the marketplace. We also proposed the following communication elements with BeneCom responsible for all copywriting, graphic design, production and distribution:

- **Managers' Briefing Paper and Summary of Focus Group Results** – explained what was changing and why, the impact on employees, the communication strategy and timetable and their expected role in the communication process.
- **Managers' PowerPoint Presentation** – based on the briefing paper content and used in face-to-face meetings with all key managers and supervisors.
- **Employee Announcements** – following the distribution of the managers' briefing paper, postcards were mailed to the employees' homes, special posters were created for the worksite, along with internally generated memos and supporting e-mails.
- **Special Benefits Newsletters** – two pre-enrollment issues were produced to help

build employees' knowledge and comfort with the revisions and the enrollment process. The first issue highlighted key results from previously-conducted employee focus groups and provided an overview of the new, revised benefits program.

The second issue offered insight behind the decision to change the benefit plan and the rationale for re-introducing cost sharing.

The enrollment materials included:

- **Announcement Letter** – a brief cover letter was included with the enrollment kit with the new rates for the plans.
- **Enrollment Kit** – the kit included the cover letter/rate sheet, a 20-page highlights brochure, and enrollment and beneficiary forms collated into a 9 ½" x 12 ½" envelope.
- **Employee Meetings** – conducted by contracted individuals and some internal HR staff.
- **Generic Letterhead** – reflected the new logo and theme used for internally generated memos and future benefit updates.
- **PowerPoint Presentation for Employee Meetings** – expanded on the content of the managers' briefing materials to include more detail on the main features of each benefit plan.
- **PDF Files** – to support the print materials, electronic versions of the press-materials were provided for the HR Intranet site.

Our client credits the extensive communication campaign and plan design revisions for the dramatic drop in the escalating rate of the cost to provide health and prescription drug benefits during the first full plan year – from 40% to only a 2% increase for health and pharmacy claims. The health care system continues to retain BeneCom to revise and produce print-on-demand enrollment guides for new hires and the organization's first personalized total compensation benefit statements.

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