

## **Healthwise® (Boise, Idaho, USA) Individual Responsibility**

### **Section I: Summary**

Healthwise®, Inc is a nonprofit organization which seeks to help people make better, more informed health decisions. Healthwise helps patients/consumers learn how to do more for themselves, ask for the care they need, and say “no” to the care they don’t need. Information is disseminated through the Healthwise handbook a guide to self-directed care and online resources. Healthwise contracts with health plans, hospitals, disease management companies, and health web sites to provide up-to-date, evidence-based information to the people they serve.

### **Section II: Statement of purpose**

A growing body of literature suggests that appropriately prescribed, decision-focused, evidence-based health information can empower consumers and enable them to *participate as active partners* in their own health care, thereby improving outcomes. Clinicians can help facilitate these improvements in care quality by prescribing targeted information to their patients, particularly when all are supported by a sophisticated information technology infrastructure.

By providing individuals with pertinent information, at the right time, and in the right setting, permits patients to take an active role in their health and health care. The content must be tailored to specific individuals and meet their needs to enable better health decisions, behavior changes, and support disease or self-management. Consumer-centered education also must reach beyond traditional medical topics and expand to include other areas of concern, such as community support resources.

To promote this behavior, *Healthwise® Inc*, a nonprofit organization has developed consumer health content to help people take an active role in their health by making health decisions that are right for them. Specifically, the *Healthwise® Handbook* provides patients and their families them with information on various topics including: when to call a health provider, home treatment and prevention methods, and how to speak to with your provider about health issues or concerns. First published in 1975, the handbook is in its 17<sup>th</sup> edition with over 30 million copies distributed.

Healthwise, Inc. also offers clients online interactive health information tools (known as Healthwise® Knowledgebase). These services help consumers/patients learn important facts about health issues as well as providing simple health prevention tools. The online service provides patients with in-depth information on a wide range of issues and questions such as: whether they are at risk for a heart

attack or stroke, what smoking costs, or how many calories are burned during physical activities.

Healthwise is a private company which contracts with health plans and other organizations, such as hospitals, health insurance plans, and disease management companies to provide these services to their patients/consumers. The services are intended to help these health management companies control overall costs as well as promote individual responsibility and improve health.

### **Section III: Outcomes**

Because services are provided to private groups, a general evaluation is less readily available. However, Healthwise has measured the effectiveness of specific endeavors.

#### Example I

In 1995, Healthwise launched its own public health initiative, the Healthwise Communities Project (HCP) to make southwestern Idahoans "the best informed most empowered health care consumers in the world." The project lasted from 1995 through 1999.

Healthwise distributed more than 143,000 copies of the *Healthwise Handbook* to residents, provided access to the online Healthwise Knowledgebase and a telephone nurse advice line, and sponsored consumer and provider workshops and seminars.

Three years after the program launch, residents demonstrated an increased level of health knowledge and individual responsibility for their health. Though difficult to project an exact dollar figure, Healthwise estimates the program saved between \$7.5 to \$21.5 million in unnecessary health care costs. Of every ten Idaho households in a six-month period:

- 7 used a *Healthwise*<sup>®</sup> *Handbook* to self-treat a symptom or health problem.
- 4 reported saving at least one visit to the doctor.
- 2 reported saving at least one emergency room visit.

#### Example II

Adapted from the community health improvement model outlined above, the Partners Health Initiative (PHI), a community health improvement coalition based in South Carolina launched a similar effort empower health care consumers in their community

The Partners Health Initiative (PHI) the program was implemented in Anderson, Oconee, and Pickens counties in South Carolina and Hart County, Georgia, with a combined population of approximately 358,000. The PHI vision was to:

- Improve the accessibility and availability of quality consumer information for everyone.
- Improve residents' confidence, skills, and abilities to make informed health care decisions.
- Encourage appropriate use of available health resources to lower costs.
- Increase satisfaction with the health care system by improving compliance and personal health management.

Evaluators conducted surveys of 524 residents of Anderson, Oconee, Pickens, and Hart counties during the spring of 2002, 30 months after the intervention. They found 41% of those surveyed said they had used the *Healthwise Handbook* within the past six months, a 4.5% increase over previous 18-months. Of those users using the Handbook:

- 76% said they had used the book to treat a health symptom.
- 77% said they had used it to decide whether to see a doctor.
- 58% said they had saved a doctor visit as a result.
- 37% had saved a visit to the ER.

Applying these figures to the total population, the PHI reported that:

- 23% saved a visit to the doctor.
- 15% saved a visit to the ER.

While difficult to project an exact dollar savings, evaluators estimate that the *Healthwise Handbook* saved \$34.5 million in health care costs during 30 months of the initiative. Evaluators found a marked increase in cost savings among underinsured and uninsured populations, who were more likely to use the *Healthwise Handbook* and save unnecessary doctor and ER visits.

#### **Section IV: Contact Information and References**

##### Contacts:

Healthwise, Inc.  
PO Box 1989  
Boise, ID 83701  
1.800.706.9646

[www.healthwise.org](http://www.healthwise.org).

### Other Sources of Information

Gwinn, Bianca R. and Seidman, Joshua, *The Ix Evidence Base: Using Information Therapy to Cross the Quality Chasm* (Bethesda: Center for Information Therapy) 2007, available at:  
<http://www.informationtherapy.org/publications/documents/e0726.pdf> , accessed: August 7, 2008.

Kemper, Don W., and Molly Mettler. *Information Therapy: Prescribed Information as a Reimbursable Medical Service*. Boise: Healthwise, Incorporated 2002.