

Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Senator Murray, and, members of the Committee.
Employer Wellness Programs...

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to share my story about the benefits I received by participating in my company's voluntary wellness program as part of a culture of wellness at my workplace. My name is Matt Abernathy. I work in Nashville, Tennessee as a Regional Service Coordinator for BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee. With me today are my wife, Holly, my daughter, Shannon, and my son, Iain. I am 32 years old and have worked at BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee since 2002.

Today, I am very pleased to be described as "a picture of health," by my doctor. That's a statement I am very proud of. However, it is also a statement that did not apply to me just a few years ago.

In 2003, I was 21 years old and weighed 250 pounds; my diet was poor, and I did not exercise at all. After completing a health risk assessment, my doctor told me I had high blood pressure, high cholesterol, was pre-diabetic, and was a high-risk for a heart attack.

This bothered me, but not enough to do anything about it. I did what many people do when hearing these kinds of warnings...I didn't go back to my doctor for a number of years. Things changed after the birth of our daughter, Shannon, in 2007. I realized it was time to change things if I wanted to be around to see her grow up. I realized that if I wanted my children's health and their lives to be different than mine that I would have to break the cycle and be a good example to them.

I started a run/walk program. I started educating myself on proper diet and nutrition. When our son, Iain, was born 2 years later, for all the same reasons as when Shannon was born, I knew these changes needed to become a way of life.

I found support first, in my wife, Holly. She's been there through it all, and continues to support me – as well as instill these values in our children.

I have also found support and needed resources through my employer and their wellness program. BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee has a wellness program that is powered by Onlife Health.

Early in my career at BlueCross I had participated in the program, but after the birth of my children, I began taking full advantage of the resources.

I was provided the tools I needed to set goals, track my progress, make changes, and stay on track:

These included:

- Free Annual Health Assessments and Biometric Screenings (to measure my weight, blood pressure, cholesterol, glucose levels, and other fitness indicators) provided at my workplace
- A secure online wellness portal for 24/7 access to tools, and resources
- Access to Professional Health Coaching
- Electronic pedometer – as well as walking programs

The Health coaches encouraged me to get moving and to become active. They provided accountability as well and educational material and expert guidance.

The Onlife Health program and their professional Health Coaches have been a mainstay for my journey to wellness. The wellness program helped me recognize the unhealthy habits that I had developed, and the options and resources available to me to break those habits and learn new ones. I learned that maintaining this way of life would take time, a commitment on my part, personal accountability, and replacing the unhealthy habits with healthy ones. That meant eating better, being more active, getting more rest, and reducing stress.

From the health assessment, my health profile was established. Over the years, I have worked with great health coaches who encourage me, taken the time to learn my personal goals, and helped me set realistic action plans to achieve those goals. They have provided me with information about proper nutrition, moderation, and balanced diet.

My employer, BlueCross Blueshield of Tennessee, set up a walking program and invited employees to track the number of steps we took each day. They provided us with pedometers and rewarded us for reaching step goals. Onlife Health helped me keep track of everything on their secure online wellness portal. I continue to use Onlife's wellness portal to track my progress and stay in touch with my coaches.

The financial incentives the company offers further motivate and reward me for doing healthy activities. Incentives are tied to participation in the various programs offered by Onlife. For example, we are rewarded up to \$200 per quarter for reaching our step goals, and I receive discounts on my health insurance. Today, the financial incentives are secondary to me; my main motivation is maintaining a healthy lifestyle for my family and me.

Shannon and Iain now have a dad who is fit and healthy. I have completed 6 half-marathons and 2 full marathons. My weight is down to 188 pounds and I am training to run the toughest

trail marathon in the country, the Savage Gulf Marathon in Beersheba Springs, Tennessee, in March.

My wife, Holly, is a runner too, and even our 7-year- old enjoys running with us and getting out and competing in fun runs. What has become a big transformation in my life is now a part of my children’s lives. What was my wellness journey has become a wellness journey for our entire family.

My workplace wellness program gave me a support system that helped me succeed.

And it is contagious. I have many friends and co-workers who have become more active and are now running buddies of mine. As a result of my new lifestyle, my children will not face many of the struggles I had to deal with in the past. They understand the benefits of exercise, good food choices, and moderation.

This wasn’t an overnight fitness program – this is an ongoing commitment and a deliberate lifestyle transformation.

I’m thankful for my wife, my workplace wellness program, and my health coaches who helped me change from an overweight, at-risk employee into a picture of health.

Disclaimer:

Mr. Abernathy’s testimony is his own account of a personal wellness journey which included participation in a voluntary, formal workplace wellness program. Mr. Abernathy’s outcomes are not meant to be representative of, nor can they be reasonably expected for participants in this or similar workplace wellness programs.