

To: University Staff (Merit Supervisory)

Re: Staff News and Updates

Dear Colleagues:

The beginning of a new year is an opportunity to reflect on changes we have experienced. I would like to share my observations of several developments during the latter half of 2006, that I believe will continue to enhance the health, work, and productivity of University staff well into the new year:

The results of the "Working @ Iowa" survey provided insight into the factors that engage staff in their work at the University, and identify specific areas we can improve upon, both as a University and within local work units. I have met personally with each of the Deans, Vice Presidents and major unit directors to discuss the specific survey results for their individual college or division. From these conversations, we are working collectively to find ways to improve our work culture, and we hope to see positive changes when the survey is repeated in 2008.

The change in prescription drug coverage under the University's health insurance plans has had a greater impact than anticipated. Implemented in January of 2006, the option of free generic drugs has increased the use of generic drugs from 46% to 57% and resulted in savings of over \$2 million to the University health plans. While our total costs continue to increase, the savings from the use of generic drugs helped contain the increase in health insurance costs, providing savings both to individuals and the University.

One improvement in the area of benefits that we have been working toward is daily (rather than weekly) processing of payments from the Flexible Spending accounts available to staff for the reimbursement of medical and child care expenses. This improvement will get money into the hands of staff for these expenses more quickly. We anticipate implementation of this change in the coming weeks for those staff that have designated direct deposit for these payments.

Many staff have taken advantage of the new Career Development Advising Service, scheduling individual appointments to discuss their career at the University and their career goals, identifying achievable steps toward these goals, as well as practical advice on resume writing, interviewing and job search skills. Those who have participated have reported that they believe this service is a valuable new benefit.

A new leadership development initiative, UI LEAD, has been launched by Human Resources to assist new and emerging leaders at the University. Through education, assessment, and personal development, we see this as an opportunity to build our current and future leaders.

Cultural Linguistics Services, launched earlier in the year for employees who are English language learners, is growing, both in terms of those served, as well as in its value in facilitating communication and understanding among and between departments, staff members and peers. By breaking down language barriers and building understanding about cultural perceptions, this service provides a benefit for all involved.

Staff are continuing their involvement in the liveWELL program launched in April 2006 with the on-line health assessment survey. Many individuals are actively working to increase their health and wellness through individual counseling, as well as activities and programs available through the University Wellness programs. Participants give particularly high marks to the health coach service, noting that it not only has improved their health, but also their productivity and satisfaction while at work.

University staff members also have additional resources available to assist them with disease management through a new benefit provided by Wellmark called Blueprints for Health. This service, staffed by trained health professionals, provides assistance to employees and family members in understanding treatment plans, prescriptions and in managing their own health. In addition, the program benefits the University through the increased health, productivity of staff, and the containment of our healthcare costs.

Also related to health, Human Resources is offering a new program called Well @ Work, designed to support staff that have been diagnosed with depression, and to facilitate their ability to be present and successful at work. As we become increasingly aware of the impact depression has on individuals, this program has the potential to support the employee, those that work with them and the effectiveness of the work unit in a positive way.

The Staff Guidebook that was distributed to staff in hard copy in September has been a great reminder of the benefits and opportunities that come with University employment. Please continue to refer to the online version as a resource to utilize the opportunities available to you: <http://www.staffresources.uiowa.edu>

I co-chaired the University's Smoking Task Force that has made recommendations regarding restrictions on smoking on the University Campus. While the full recommendations are still being debated, interim measures were taken to prohibit smoking from building entrances, in order to assure that all staff have access to University buildings without encountering the effects of second hand smoke, a recognized health hazard.

The Learning and Development unit is working to bring University specific courses to staff on-line at their desktops. Soon you will be able to access courses such as E-deposit, cash handling, and procurement card procedures through the "My Training" function of the Self Service site.

Finally, a major accomplishment in the past months has been to move the merit system job application to an electronic format. This has been enormously successful and greatly improves the employment process at the University, for employers, current staff seeking new opportunities, and for potential merit staff members.

The themes you can see from these changes reflect our continuing efforts to provide a healthy and productive work environment for all University staff members. We look forward to working with you and continuing these efforts in the year ahead.