

Health Care Blog Releases Book by Al Lewis and Vik Khanna, Exposes Dark Side to Popular Wellness Programs

Authors use satire and data to show corporate wellness programs raise health, privacy, and cost concerns while failing to save money

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Members of the media can request review copies of *Surviving Workplace Wellness* directly from THCB by e-mailing "I'd like a review copy please" to THCB Press coordinator Maithri Vangala (maithri@thehealthcareblog.com).

The first book in The Health Care Blog's (THCB) new e-book series tackles America's workplace wellness industry and finds failed promises and new risks for employees, raising questions about the popularity of the initiatives which are enshrined in Obamacare and enjoy bipartisan support.

Authored by Al Lewis and Vik Khanna, veteran THCB contributors, *Surviving Workplace Wellness...With Your Dignity, Finances, and (Major) Organs Intact* (Amazon, \$9.95) is a biting and hilarious guide to the upside-down world of workplace wellness.

"*Surviving Workplace Wellness* grew out of the excellent series of posts Al and Vik did for us on wellness, starting with their excellent reporting on the Penn State story and their investigation into how corporate wellness works," said John Irvine, publisher of The Health Care Blog. "We're very excited about this release and look forward to watching Al and Vik shake up the wellness field. *Surviving Workplace Wellness* is just the first in a series of exciting e-book releases THCB has planned for 2014."

"If you work for a large company or a government agency, you are probably one of over 50 million Americans subject to a workplace wellness program," said Lewis and Khanna. "This number grows daily, and if you work for a smaller firm, workplace wellness is headed your way soon. So now it's time to fight back. This book explains why friends don't let friends do wellness."

In recent years, a growing number of employers have turned to corporate wellness programs. If your employer has offered to pay for you to go to the doctor, asked you about your weight or offered to check your A1C levels, you've met corporate wellness.

Most programs seem harmless, sensible even. Who could ever possibly object to the idea of helping employees lead health happier, healthier lives? The problem is that programs may go too far in their effort to give employers a say in their workers' lives, establishing a frightening precedent that will shock many readers. Questionnaires seek private and sensitive health information from employees who are bribed to cooperate and disclose their private behaviors to a third-party that is not their doctor or even

insurance company. What's more, most of these programs incentivize unneeded tests, biopsies, and doctor's visits that often do more harm than good. Among the disturbing findings:

1. It turns out that the science behind many wellness programs isn't exactly scientific. And that's a real problem. Instead of saving employers (and us) money by keeping costs in check, many are actually driving health care costs up significantly.
2. Do you have the right to eat a cheeseburger? Or grab a drink after work? Ridiculous questions, right? Not for some employer wellness programs. Should your employer – or anybody else for that matter - have access to your electronic medical record? That's the direction more aggressive programs are headed in.
3. Sounds bad? Well, it gets worse. Many of the same ideas (overly aggressive screening for cancers, a push towards pushing drugs and procedures over more conservative medicine) have made it into the federal health reform effort, meaning bad science is becoming bad government that is going to impact all of us.

Al Lewis and Vik Khanna are health care and benefit experts who were once true believers in the wellness programs now in vogue at thousands of American companies and embedded in the Affordable Care Act. They wanted workplace wellness to work, but soon realized the industry's claims in cost savings and health outcomes were deeply flawed and wildly overstated. Lewis and Khanna have investigated wellness for years, now culminating their research with this guide that shows readers why these programs are failing and how to protect themselves from their hazards and expenses.

Matthew Woessner, associate professor of political science at Penn State, helped lead a campus revolt against a new wellness program—and won. He says that "Lewis and Khanna's book does a remarkable job of exposing the folly of many corporate wellness policies. It's clear from Lewis and Khanna's research that Penn State really didn't do its homework before embarking on the nation's most aggressive wellness program. Thankfully, this story may have a happy ending. ... We have Al and Vik to thank for making the case that these type of wellness plans are costly and ineffective."

Leah Binder, President and CEO of The Leapfrog Group, said, "this book is so laugh-out-loud funny you may wonder if it's really serious but actually it's a sobering expose of the troubling worksite wellness trend in American business."

Paul Levy, formerly head of the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston and the popular blogger behind "Not Running a Hospital blog", says: "Al and Vik use a new technique in characterizing these programs: Analytic rigor, based on actual data, actual costs, and actual results. They pierce the veil of political correctness on this topic, explaining how human resources departments align with vendors and insurers to exploit the understandable hope of all of us that there is a holy grail in the health care world."

Story angles:

- Armed with new monitoring technology and sophisticated data analysis tools, employers are now in the position to monitor all aspects of their employees' lives;
- Workplace wellness concepts and practices enjoy bipartisan support and are key to major incentives in the Affordable Care Act, but no reliable research supports the industry's claims;
- Many wellness programs are worst-case examples of the trend in the over-diagnosis and overtreatment of essentially healthy people;
- Wellness assessments introduce workers' private health and personal behavior information to outside companies with troubling privacy implications.

Surviving Workplace Wellness is now available for purchase on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

With a rapidly growing audience of 750,000 healthcare professionals, The Health Care Blog (THCB to healthcare industry veterans) is widely considered healthcare's leading social media voice. Founded in 2004 by publisher Matthew Holt and technologist John Irvine, THCB is based in San Francisco. The site runs a daily lineup of posts on the intersection of healthcare, wellness and technology. To be added to the THCB Press mailing list to be updated on new releases and media events [email the editor](#).