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HEALTH PLAN TASK FORCE (HPTF)

MINUTES

THURSDAY, MARCH 2, 2000

10:00 - 12:00

170 HHH INSTITUTE

[These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate or Twin Cities Campus Assembly; none of the comments, conclusions, or actions reported in these minutes represent the view of, nor are they binding on the Senate or Assembly, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.]

PRESENT: Dick McGehee (Chair), Linda Aaker, Avner Ben-Ner, Richard Butler, Carol Carrier, Amos Deinard, Keith Dunder, Robert Fahnhorst, George Green, Bev Hall, David Hamilton, Christopher Hulla, Priscilla Pope, Kathryn Pouliot, Gailon Roen, Harlan Smith, Anna Sommers, Robert Sonkowsky, Larry Thompson, Gavin Watt.

REGRETS: Bart Finzel.

1. CHAIR'S REPORT

Dick McGehee said that at a recent Labor Management Committee meeting, after discovering that nothing will take place until a new commission becomes active, he asked if they were dead in the water, but this was denied. As a recap, he stated that the commissioner of the Department of Employee Relations and Kathy Burek, assistant commissioner, resigned at the same time. With the lack of leadership, nothing will be moving forward at this point. A new commissioner might be named in March or April.

One report that was given regarded the change in enrollment. Most plans have experienced decreases, except for Preferred One which was just offered this last year. One surprise was that the expensive state health plan increased slightly. State Health Plan Select also increased and now has 58% of the market share of the state, not including the University.

A satisfaction survey of health plans was done a year ago of the state employees, not including the University. These results were then compared with national averages to see where significant deviations occurred. In general, there are more cases where state employees were happier than the national average. For state employees, the satisfaction with specialists was significantly lower in Minnesota than the rest of the country. Looking across the plans, the lowest rated plan was the most expensive one. One interpretation from this is that the more that people use their plan, the less satisfied they are with it.

Another survey was also done by the Foundation for Accountability (FACCT) which targeted people with diagnosed problems such as diabetes, heart disease, and asthma at three different clinics. While the results are considered confidential, the survey did discover that there was a significant difference between care levels at the three clinics.

2. BIG TEN EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

Robert Fahnhorst discussed the chart that was distributed to committee members. Kathryn Pouliot added that Wisconsin is considering separation from the state since its new employees have a six month waiting period before they can join the state plan.

Committee members then commented that participation for a few universities has switched since the last meeting, the University of Michigan is still not included, and from the table members cannot tell which group at Iowa is happy and which is not.

Robert Fahnhorst said that he would double-check the information and have a revised version at the next meeting.

3. GRADUATE ASSISTANT RFP PROCESS AND SURVEY

Robert Fahnhorst said that the current insurance company opted not to participate with the University for a third year. Therefore an RFP regarding health insurance for graduate assistants was recently sent to 11 companies. The due date is March 8 after which time interviews will be held before a selection is made and forwarded to the Regents for approval. A web survey has also been sent out to graduate assistants regarding their satisfaction with the current plan. The due date is March 10 and 300 replies have been received.

Q: Was there any interest from local health insurance companies?

A: Health Partners, Medica, and Blue Cross/Blue Shield have all expressed some degree of interest.

4. FOCUS GROUPS

Christopher Hulla reported that focus groups were held on the four campuses and there was good participation except for students and retirees. To target these groups, the consultants are going to try to attend regularly scheduled meetings; COGS is scheduled for tonight, the Retirees meet on April 6, and then only the undergraduates are left.

For the other groups, 20-30 people were invited with the hope that 10-12 would attend. At Duluth and Crookston the groups averaged 15-16 people. Smaller group sizes allowed the consultants to talk more in-depth with participants.

He then turned to the report generated from the focus groups, the format of which included an executive summary of the process, key responses, questions, all comments received, and questionnaire responses. He summarized some points from the document.

Overall Impressions

Employees understand that:

- Current benefits represent a good deal
- More providers means an increase in cost
- The larger the group the better the deal that the University can make with insurance providers
- Higher than average understanding of the benefits package that is currently offered

Because of these responses survey questions might need to be adjusted to acknowledge the current level of understanding otherwise the response rate might decrease.

Employees have little knowledge of the relationship with the state for purchasing benefits and of the Health Plan Task Force and its efforts.

A perceived advantage includes benefits customized to the University, while a disadvantage includes the loss of purchasing power without the state.

Employee concerns if the University separates include:

- Twin Cities faculty controlling the process; coordinate campuses would have less leverage power and urban concerns might nullify rural needs
- Administration could cut funding and/or options
- Administration running the plan on a daily basis
- Customer service might suffer

Q: Did the focus groups ask what ways people like to be informed of their benefits?

A: Many said that they received most of their information from the annual mailing, but preferred that it went to their home address. There was variation for other methods, such as the web, depending on people's knowledge and comfort levels. More information on the process would be useful.

Q: How many people knew about the HPTF?

A: Of the 83 people who attended all the sessions, 2 knew quite a bit, 3-4 knew some, and 5 had heard of the group.

Q: Did any specific group(s) know about the process?

A: There were not enough people to be able to accurately tell.

Robert Fahnhorst said that information on the HPTF was included in the enrollment packet this last year.

A committee member then suggested that a communication group might need to be formed to find new ways to get information to everyone involved. Committee members then made the following comments:

- The University communication department should be consulted to help in developing a plan
- When should people be informed?
- People need to know before the survey to avoid a negative impact
- It might be a waste of time to try to communicate now
- People need to be offered the opportunity to learn about the process at these early stages
- Popular media might see this effort as a solution to managed care, which it is not
- Process should not be dominated by a minority of people and leave the uninterested behind
- If people are contacted too much a 'cry wolf' problem might occur so that people become detached from the entire process
- On-going communication, in the form of an e-mail summary from the HPTF, might help
- The mode of communication might need to be changed to raise awareness
- Not all employees have access to e-mail and web, such as AFSCME employees
- People could subscribe to a listserv but who would maintain it?
- Since consultants are still gathering information, there is nothing to tell at this point
- Communication might need to be unit based to reach all people
- DDD list can be used but then administrators get to decide what to pass on
- One page special addition of U and Your Benefits could be produced and mailed to all employees, with references to other information sources

Q: Will the survey raise awareness in the process?

A: The survey can address education in the introduction and then reference people to the web for more information. If too much is disclosed though, it might color the survey results.

Dick McGehee then decided that Carol Carrier and himself would meet with the communications department to see what options are available.

5. EMPLOYEE SURVEY

Christopher Hulla explained that the survey will hopefully be kept to a one page mailing with an introduction and instructions on the front and the questions on the back. Draft questions will be reviewed by a subcommittee before being brought to the full committee. There is no date yet for sending out the survey.

As for the ID number, 20% of the focus group attendees felt uncomfortable or very uncomfortable with this concept. Therefore, to be able to collect accurate data, yet have a high number of responses, different phone numbers will be assigned for each subgroup. The survey will then ask people to answer questions on age, campus, and gender. Downsides to this proposal include people using the wrong number, busy signals from a limited number of phone lines, and people answering multiple times, but it seems to be the only balance between accuracy and reluctance to answer.

Q: Will information be available to tell who the non-respondents are and if they are a significant percent of the population?

A: People are randomly-selected but then their information is stored. Buck will know the number sent and the number of replies. Percentages could then be looked at.

Q: Could a non-sequential number be used with a PIN number to guard against multiple replies?

A: This would be preferred but the perception is still there for many people that they can be identified through that number.

Q: How many questions will be on the survey?

A: There will be 3-4 demographic questions and then 12-20 substantive questions.

Question sensitivity will be an issue since the survey will want to get at utilization patterns and satisfaction without actually being able to ask if a person uses a specific service, such as Mental Health. Satisfaction results will also differ between healthy people and those who are heavy users of the services.

Dick McGehee said that more volunteers are needed to serve on the survey subcommittee. The following people then volunteered: Amos Deinard, Gavin Watt, Bev Hall, Linda Aaker, Larry Thompson, and Anna Sommers. It was then decided that Buck would send the survey proposals to members and the subcommittee would use the next HPTF meeting date on March 16 to work on the survey. Subcommittee members should meet in this room at 10 a.m.

Professor McGehee thanked everyone for attending and adjourned the meeting.

Rebecca Hippert
University Senate