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Employers look to encourage routine cancer screenings

Southeast Wisconsin employers are concerned about workers delaying routine cancer screenings.

Jeffrey Kluever, executive director of the Business Health Care Group, said during a Wednesday virtual forum that they've reached out to actuaries about the downturn in cancer screenings.

"There is no question there is going to be an increase in expense for employers," he said. "The reason is really two-fold. One is because the screenings have not been done and there will be an issue associated with the course of the disease for an individual who has cancer. And they also, and this was very disconcerting actually, but they also indicated there will be a spike in mortality associated with the downturn in cancer screenings."

Kluever said they're launching a campaign for their employers to remind workers of the need to get preventive care and the cancer screenings.

Dr. Gregory Busko, chief clinical officer at Ascension Wisconsin, said it's critically important for people to resume "normal healthcare."

He said that patients have put off routine cancer screening as well as visits for chronic diseases, like treating diabetes and hypertension.

"It is safe to come back into our health systems," he said. Busko always warned of "a much greater risk for folks who put off their routine screening and routine chronic care evaluations."

He said there's also expanded virtual care offerings for those who are still hesitant about visiting clinics.

Busko said providers will have to expand hours and go beyond their normal capacity to catch up to the backlog of screenings that built up when care was delayed at the start of the pandemic.

Laurie Bertrand, American Cancer Society Wisconsin executive director, said that more public outreach is needed on how to get screenings safely during the pandemic.

"We've been having a steady decline in cancer death rates for quite some time," she said. "This might be the thing that puts that number at risk, that progress at risk."

Annette Adams, senior vice president of human resource at Kohl's, said employers have an opportunity to support the importance of screenings.

"It can be just as simple as starting to message this through different platforms," she said. Employers can partner with health providers, health plans and cancer organizations to help.

Andrew Moser, American Cancer Society corporate relations director for Wisconsin, said their assessment tools can help businesses and empower employees in helping to mitigate the backlog of screenings.

"It really is a challenge that we're all facing together in the next year or two to overcome that backlog," he said.