

## Employer responsibilities

# Healthy workforce, healthier bottom-lines

PROVIDING YOUR EMPLOYEES WITH A BALANCED DIET IS NOT JUST GOOD FOR THEIR HEALTH, IT ALSO MAKES GOOD BUSINESS SENSE, SAYS **CHRIS PIPER**

A recent report - "UK Companies: Looking forward to a healthy future" - found that 80 per cent of the 600 plus Senior HR professionals they surveyed predicted that the health of the UK workforce would deteriorate in the next five to 10 years and 87 per cent of these respondents felt that this would lead to a deterioration in the morale and productivity of their workforce.

At Artizian we all know that good health is an absolute prerequisite for top performance. Good health affects every aspect of an employee's life.

Remember that the entire human body is made up of molecules derived from food. That means each day what you eat goes to build your future body. What are many of us building our bodies out of? Maybe at last we are beginning to realise that you actually are what you eat!

Even something as simple as encouraging employees to keep hydrated can have significant benefits as just a 1% decrease in hydration can produce a decrease of up to 20 per cent in production levels.

We know that poor nutritional balance correlates to an eight per cent reduction in productivity and people with bad diets are absent 15 per cent more than those with good diets. Poor eating habits such as having no breakfast and lunch or having no breakfast and snacks also lead to a productivity loss of almost 97 million working days, worth £16.85 billion, a year.

As a company that focuses on providing freshly cooked food using the freshest ingredients and with the scientific evidence building up about the connection between diet and health, we understood long ago why healthy eating in the workplace is so important.

The simple fact is that healthier employees tend to have a higher level of satisfaction and lower absenteeism resulting in increased productivity.

### **What are the benefits?**

Through their Safer Workplace and Healthier Workforce



programme, Parcellforce Worldwide contributed towards 12.5 per cent productivity increase and 50 per cent customer service improvement.

Nationwide, the world's largest building society, launched a Health and Lifestyle programme for its workforce which had the effect of a reduction in employee absence from 3.51 per cent in 2001/2 to 3.17 per cent in 2005/6; a 3 per cent reduction in smoking; cholesterol level reductions from 40 per cent – 34 per cent; and substantial cost savings from reduced absence and improved retention rates.

### Healthy workforce a "top five" boardroom issue

According to the Spend Now Save Now report, produced by Business Action on Health, UK businesses recognise that they need to do more to promote the health and well-being of their people.

While company directors identified a healthy workforce as a "top five" boardroom issue, 70 per cent of respondents admitted their own companies are not effectively promoting health and well-being.

### The role of contract caterers

The role of contract caterers in public health has changed. There is now an increased awareness of our social responsibility to provide fresh, healthier workplace meals without compromising on taste.

At Artizian, we have realised our position of influence and use it to educate and improve our clients employee health. Many of our customers eat up to 50 per cent of their weekly meals with us, it is therefore incumbent upon us to provide them with good quality, fresh, healthy food choices.

We are pioneers in this area and over the years have developed some exciting health initiatives such as our health and well being programme, Equilibrium. This is a programme where we provide an online health questionnaire which identifies areas of health where employees can improve. We also offered support in helping employees make better healthier food choices with short health seminars.

Our monthly Health e-tips and Discovery Days all offer innovative, fun and informative ways to engage with our customers. Always remembering that people move at a different paces, so not to alienate anyone, everything we do is optional and there is always choice.

The keys to creating and maintaining good employee health is education, support, motivation and choice. By providing health and wellness information within your staff restaurant you give employees the knowledge to better their own health. As they say if you look after your staff they will look after you. ■

*Chris Piper is Commercial Director of Artizian*

## French internet study into the impact of food on health will be the largest of its kind

On May 11 of this year, the French Minister of Health, Roseline Bachelot, launched a programme called NutriNet-Santé to study links between nutrition and health

Over the course of five years, the programme hopes to recruit 500,000 internet users over 18 years of age, who will provide information about their eating habits that will then be analysed by experts.

The participants will be recruited via advertising campaigns sponsored by more than 25 partners including Accor, RATP and SODEXO.

They will fill out questionnaires asking questions about their health and lifestyle and will each receive a monthly email about the progress of the study.

Many clinical studies have already proved



that nutritional factors can have an influence on the impact of diseases like cancers, cardiovascular diseases, obesity or diabetes.

The NutriNet-Santé project will help establish a number of nutritional recommendations aimed at reducing the risk of these diseases, thereby improving the nation's health.

The internet is an innovative solution because it offers access to a cross-section of volunteers and the possibility to gather information on a regular basis.

The annual 1,000,000 Euros funding needed for the study will be provided by the Ministry of Health and other institutions.

If NutriNet-Santé achieves its volunteer target, it will be the largest study of its kind ever completed. ■

*Hannah Meloul*