



HERO Member Profile: The Dow Chemical Company

HERO (the Health Enhancement Research Organization) is a non-profit corporation dedicated to employee health management research, education, policy, strategy, and leadership. Learn more at hero-health.org.

The “Dow Health Strategy” story

For this issue of *HERO On Health*, we interviewed Cathy Baase, M.D., chief health officer with The Dow Chemical Company. Dr. Baase drives health and wellness efforts for Dow’s 53,000 employees, with direct responsibilities for all occupational health, epidemiology and health promotion staff and programs in all global locations.

Dow has had a formal health promotion initiative for nearly 30 years. The “Dow Health Strategy” was established on a corporate level over 10 years ago, and builds on a comprehensive business case focused in four key areas:

1. Prevention
2. Quality and effectiveness of care
3. Health system improvement
4. Advocacy

Dow’s efforts have been recognized as innovative and successful by numerous organizations around the world. Dr. Baase has led those efforts for 19 year, and in 2012 received the Global Leadership in Corporate Health Award from the National Business Group on Health and the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. In that same year, the Institute for Health and Productivity Management recognized her with the IHPM President’s Award. In 2015, she was awarded Prevention Partners’ *Jim Long Individual Prevention Excellence Award*.

HERO On Health asked Dr. Baase to share her perspectives on creating and sustaining a global workforce wellness program.

HERO: What have been the keys to your success in creating an effective employee health management program?

Dr. Baase: We’ve continued to evolve our business case and action plans, within the framework of the Dow Health Strategy. Since we

started, we’ve had comprehensive programs covering a broad array of prevention topics – used a portfolio of methods, from education to health assessments and counseling, to group classes and targeted campaigns – and set policies such as our tobacco use policy.

Over time, the health efforts became woven throughout the fabric of the organization. They became linked with safety efforts, including off-the-job safety, leadership development and employee training programs. We became intentional about setting a positive culture and environment for health, developing a corporate food philosophy and collaborating with our facilities function to explore sit/stand desks and health-focused building design options.

We see our strategy as one of shared responsibility. A few years ago, we launched an effort called the Healthy Workplace Index. This tool assigns scores for eight key elements (including tobacco policy enforcement, access to physical activity, case management and stress management) and a cumulative score for each Dow site in the United States and throughout the world. Using it is completely voluntary for each site, yet it’s been widely implemented by the majority of company sites, with scores improving every year.

Of course, it’s critical to measure the impact of our program, and we have extensive metrics in place for all worksites. Program participation is voluntary outside the United States; we don’t use financial incentives because employees value the services and programs offered. Some people might be surprised to hear that our global participation rates are very high – approaching 90 percent for completion of health assessment.

The only financial incentive in the United States is a smoking surcharge for our medical

(\$50/month) and dental (\$10/month) plans – which can be avoided by agreeing to take a tobacco cessation class.

We're encouraged by our progress relative to critical health risks. A 2012 study conducted by Towers Watson compared our population to peer companies, with adjustment for demographics and other variables, and found that all covered lives in our United States health care plans population had a 9 percent better health risk profile than their book of business. Our prevalence of chronic conditions was 17 percent less than others; at the same time, we spent 17 percent less on chronic conditions.

I also want to mention efforts to collaborate with others to create a community of health excellence where we operate. One example of this is our work with the Michigan Health Improvement Alliance (MiHIA), serving 14 counties in central Michigan around our corporate headquarters. We've been working together since 2007 on initiatives to improve care and decision-making, using *Choosing Wisely* resources, on addressing the risks of prediabetes, and to develop a community health needs assessment toolkit. You can find out more about the toolkit on the [Healthy Workplaces, Healthy Communities website](#).

HERO: When you look at your program, what results or outcomes do you feel are the most significant?

Dr. Baase: I am most pleased that we have been successful in positively impacting the health of Dow people in a measurable way. We have a strong system and great foundation, but we always feel there is more to do.

Our greatest success has been earning and maintaining the trust of our workforce which is vital to real progress. Achieving health for a population is not something you do to people or

for people, but rather something that is accomplished by working with them. Employees need to know that everything we do in our health programs is in their best interest and we are genuinely here to serve their health.

HERO: What lessons or tips can you share with other companies who strive to improve employee health?

Dr. Baase: The reality is that this is not simple, and success is not achieved without persistent strategic and tactical efforts. We need to be in this for the long haul.

In our Dow Health Strategy, we have connected the dots between the health of our people and many corporate priorities. At this point, our business rationale links our health focus to many corporate priorities, including safety, attracting and retaining talent, employee engagement and job satisfaction, corporate social responsibility, sustainability and profitability. Alignment of organizational priorities and the benefits of a healthy population reinforce the importance of healthy people to an organization. Thus, the value to the organization is broad and includes a serious focus on health care costs and other strategic priorities.

I believe that employers have many levers and a great capacity to positively impact health. Employers can develop a robust health strategy that includes setting health-supporting policies around issues like tobacco use, and establishing a food philosophy. They can influence the culture and environment of the workplace, and have healthy buildings and office designs, including approaches that support movement appropriately. They can put their philanthropy to work to drive a healthier community. They can incorporate wise advocacy of health policies at the community, state and national levels, and so much more.



Cathy Baase, M.D., is chief health officer for The Dow Chemical Company.