



KC employers urged to help fight cancer

Smoke-free workplaces are a good step to take, HHS official says

By [Mike Sherry](#) | February 13, 2014

Fighting the nation's second leading cause of death is a smart move for companies because it helps keep their workers fit and productive, a top U.S. health official with area connections told a business audience Tuesday at the Kauffman Foundation Conference Center.

The topic was cancer prevention and Ned Holland, an assistant secretary with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, told the crowd of about 45 that it makes good business sense to take steps such as banning smoking at workplaces even in outside break areas.

"I don't mind the notion of enlightened self-interest," Holland said. "If you can reduce the exposure of your employee group to smoking dangers — or any other danger, for that matter — you can make your workforce more productive."

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, cancer is second only to heart disease in causes of death among Americans. The American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation in Berkeley, Calif., says that Kansas (but not Missouri) is among 36 states that have indoor smoking bans that include workplaces.



Photo by Mike Sherry

Hale Center for Journalism

Arielle Bogorad (right) of Cerner Corp., and Becky Moodie of UMB Financial listened Tuesday as Melissa Campbell of American Century Investments discussed her company's participation in the CEO Cancer Gold Standard accreditation program.

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Prior to joining HHS, Holland was a corporate executive in the Kansas City area, including at Sprint Corp. and its spin-off corporation, Embarq, which merged with Louisiana-based CenturyTel five years ago to form CenturyLink.

Holland also, at one time, served as the chairman of the Mid-America Coalition on Health Care, an Overland Park-based nonprofit business organization. The coalition organized the morning workshop on gaining accreditation as a CEO Cancer Gold Standard company.

The CEO Cancer Gold Standard is a program of the CEO Roundtable on Cancer, a North Carolina-based nonprofit formed more than a dozen years ago at the behest of former President George H.W. Bush. According to the group's website, Bush challenged chief executives to combat cancer in their own families, as well as in their corporations.

Started as a pilot in 2006, the gold standard program now has 162 accredited organizations, according to Peggy Harrington, manager of the program. Participants include government agencies, such as the National Cancer Institute and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Many of the accredited organizations are pharmaceutical companies, health care systems and academic medical centers.

No Kansas-based organizations are accredited, and the four Missouri participants are all in the Kansas City area: American Century Investments, Cerner Corp., UMB Financial and the Stowers Institute for Medical Research. Accreditation is free, Harrington said.

Applicants must demonstrate a focus on three main areas for their workers:

- Reducing the risk of cancer by not using tobacco and maintaining a healthy and active lifestyle.
- Detecting cancer at the earliest possible stage through age and gender-appropriate screenings.
- Ensuring access to the best available cancer treatment.

Establishing a completely tobacco-free workplace is a key priority of the accreditation program, Harrington said. Part of that anti-smoking effort, she said, is educating the workforce so that, for instance, parents can make sure their children don't start smoking.

“If they are more educated, they will know how highly addictive tobacco is – and they can warn (their children) they should not start smoking when they are young teenagers,” Harrington said.

The Mid-America Coalition on Health Care issued a resource guide in 2012 on how to promote tobacco cessation in the workplace.

The workshop included a panel of benefits officials from American Century, UMB and Cerner. The panelists agreed that taking the leap to a fully tobacco-free campus was one of the hardest steps to take.

“It’s a journey for all of us – an evolution, if you will,” said Arielle Bogorad, director of worldwide benefits for Cerner.

By using incentives through its health insurance program, she said, Cerner has reduced the smoking rate among its domestic workforce from 12 percent in 2007 to 3 percent in 2012.

At American Century, Melissa Campbell said seeking the accreditation was the “little shove” the company needed to fully implement a tobacco-free environment. The company has few workers that smoke, she said, so it had not been high on the priority list.

Campbell said American Century was probably already doing three-quarters of the activities required for accreditation.

Harrington also said a major focus of the accreditation program is ensuring more information is provided to employees about participation in clinical trials for new cancer drugs.

Holland said Kansas City-area companies now have a federally recognized treatment organization in the community through the University of Kansas Cancer Center, which achieved certification as an NCI-designated center in 2012.

Harrington also said it does not always take that much to encourage healthy choices for employees.

One small employer in North Carolina that has achieved the gold standard, she said, simply installed a shower so that workers could clean up after biking to work.

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