

There is a discernable move away from containing sickness and disease and towards promoting performance and productivity



“ It is now well recognised that the only sustainable way of impacting upon the ever increasing burden of ill-health in society is to prevent people getting unwell in the first place,” says Dr Peter Mills, chief medical officer at vielife and NHS physician. Treating conditions when they occur, rather than preventing them happening in the first place, is having major implications on society as a whole with conditions such as stress, sleep problems, diabetes and musculoskeletal disease all rapidly increasing.”

Research has already shown that health promotion in the workplace reduces absenteeism due to ill health and also reduces healthcare costs, say vielife. If, as we believe, it can also have an effect upon the productivity and performance of employees we then have a very persuasive argument for getting employers to pay for health promotional activities for their workforce. That has to be good news for the health and fitness industry in general and those serving the corporate sector in particular.

It is against this background that Sona chief executive, Chris Jessop, talks about a discernable move, in the corporate sector at least, away from containing sickness and disease and towards promoting performance and productivity. “Even in a tough economy, companies are still prepared to invest in the welfare of their people but they are increasingly looking for a one-stop-shop of integrated services that allow their staff to proactively manage their health and wellbeing. The gym is now a catalyst for a range of healthcare initiatives across the board,” says Chris. This would be a mantra that the mainstream operators would do well to adopt, would it not?

Commenting on a recent survey showing that 60% of people believe that their employer should be responsible for their healthcare, Chris Jessop says: “People are much more health-conscious

nowadays and many companies are adopting a more enlightened, socially-responsible approach to the health of their employees in order to recruit and retain talent and drive productivity and performance. I guess you could say that the focus has switched from absenteeism to presenteeism.”

If the health and fitness industry is to engage a larger percentage of the population, we have to start to deliver both health and fitness – not just fitness.

In keeping with Chris Jessop’s background with Bupa, Sona has come a long way since the acquisition of Tweedpark in 2001. In addition to managing corporate fitness facilities Sona now offers a comprehensive range of leading-edge health and wellbeing services, with a national physiotherapy

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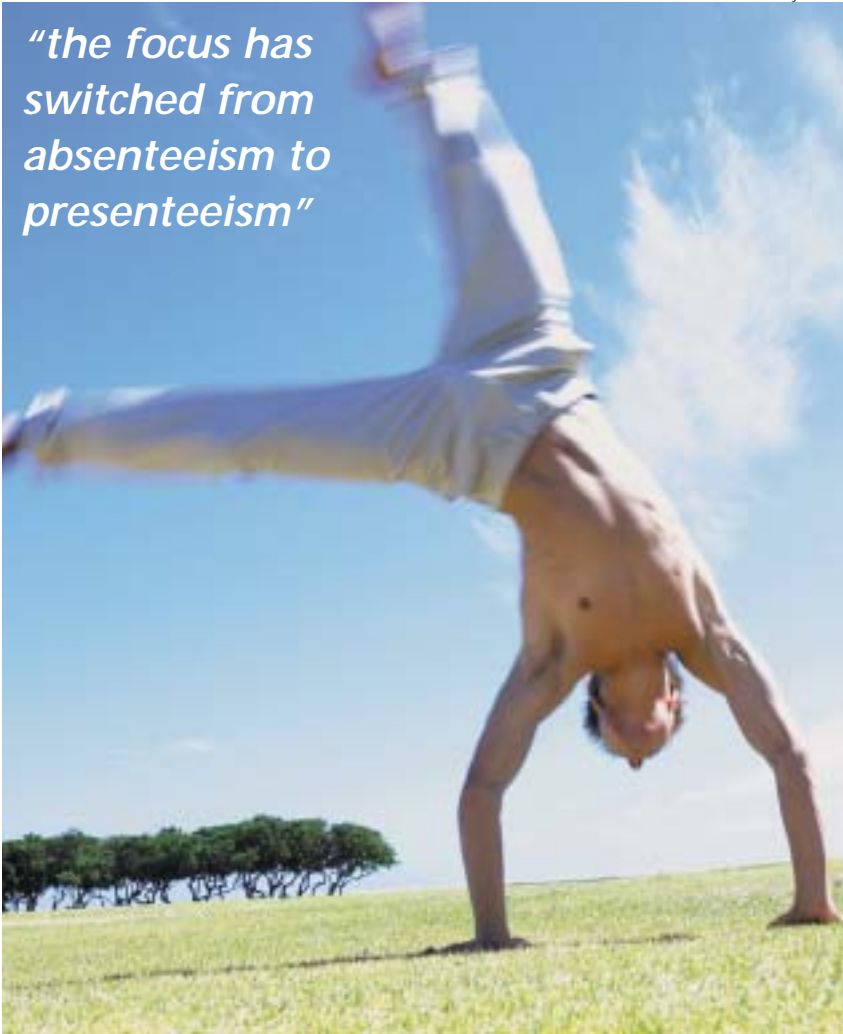
network, nutrition, rehabilitation, osteoporosis screening, chair massage, complementary therapies and spa services. “The corporate market gives us permission to be a little more serious,” says Jessop, “What we aim to do is underpin the energy and excitement of the fitness sector with a robustness of purpose,” he adds “Staffing is one of the biggest differentiators for us,” he says, “We recruit highly qualified fitness staff, for example, and we pay them accordingly. Given our focus on sound clinical governance we also invest significantly in

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their ongoing training and development."

Precor is one of the suppliers currently working with Sona, and UK Sales Director, Jez Whitting, says: "Mainstream fitness has much to learn from what is happening in the corporate sector where Sona is helping to drive an increasingly holistic approach to health and wellbeing. As Chris says, "Sona gyms are seen as a platform for a whole range of complementary products and services."

Speaking in People Management magazine healthcare consultant Paul Roberts says: "Healthcare is only part of the solution and more organisations are looking at all aspects of health to get better solutions to help people stay well, rather than an insurance policy to look after an employee once they have become ill."

Loans.co.uk chooses Precor

Loans.co.uk is another corporate fitness facility that has chosen to work with Precor. Project Manager Lee Whippey confirms the power of having a well-equipped gym when he says, "We are a progressive company which wants to recruit and retain the best staff and

there is no question that our fitness centre helps us to do that. Our staff profile is pretty young, so there is a natural demand. When we asked the staff what they wanted in terms of ancillary facilities, a gym came pretty high up the wish-list."

Open from 6am – 10pm the Loans.co.uk fitness facility is proving extremely popular with employees who pay £20 per month for sports and social club membership including unlimited use of the fitness centre and aerobics studio. "That is really good value; salary is always important but people are looking for the complete package from employers nowadays. There is no question that the fitness centre gives us an edge," says Lee. "There is a fresh approach to the interior design, with its clever use of lighting, colour, posters of sporting heroes which all generates a unique feel," he adds.

Equipped with 16 pieces of Precor cardiovascular equipment and 12 Precor strength machines the new 2,000 square foot gym opened in September 2003 and is proving very popular with Loans.co.uk staff.

Lee worked in the US for ten years, and was familiar with Precor equipment.

Having researched the market, they were one of the first companies he approached in the UK. "Precor equipment is of the highest quality and their service before, during and after the installation has been quite outstanding. I would recommend Precor to anyone," says Lee.

Loans.co.uk, in addition to selecting the equipment, took advantage of the knowledge that Precor offer on Health Club Operations and Management. In this case, Precor provided advice on staff recruitment and training – whether to use gym instructors or personal trainers. Thus providing the facility with piece of mind and an added value service.

For further information on Precor products and services, call 0118 973 3995.

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