

In Memoriam

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In Memoriam*—Dee W. Edington PhD (September 3, 1937, to June 21, 2022)

Dr Dee Edington's groundbreaking work in wellness and health provides a strong foundation on which we must continue to build. He started his career working as a biomedical researcher. What he learned across his life's work led to his more recent focus on whole-person, high-level wellness.



Edington generated more than four decades of research and teachings demonstrating the association of health risk factors with medical, pharmacy, disability, absenteeism, and presenteeism costs for employers. He received his B.S. and PhD degrees from Michigan State University and completed his M.S. at Florida State University. He did post-doctoral work at the University of Toronto and taught at the University of Massachusetts before moving to the University of Michigan. In 1976, he established what would become known as the U of Michigan Health Management Research Center in Ann Arbor.

The Health Management Research Center eventually housed a database of over 10 million employee health risk assessments linked with health insurance claims, disability claims, and other information. This data allowed it to become a world leader in studying how health choices

influence total health, productivity, vitality, quality of life, and healthcare expenditures. He and his University of Michigan colleagues were the first to publish on the association between excess healthcare costs and health risk factors. The landmark Steelcase study demonstrated that changes in

managing the spiraling cost of health care.

From his over 400 publications, Edington's research demonstrated the importance of managing health risk when managing population health. Although corporations devote a large percentage of their budgets to employee health care

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healthcare costs followed changes in health risk factors. This concept became a fundamental building block for health promotion in the workplace and allowed him to teach health care purchasers about how keeping healthy people healthy plays an essential role in

costs, his message to CEOs was that they should be champions of a culture of health in their organizations rather than just focusing on prevention and disease management. The health of employees should be considered an investment, not an expense, and it

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should be a serious business strategy.

Edington's research speaks to the importance of helping healthy people stay healthy as well as addressing the high risks of the small percentage of employees who incur the greatest percentage of costs. He would state bluntly that the "do nothing" strategy of the past just won't work—we must consider new approaches to manage the health care cost crisis in the US and other countries. He came to understand that organizations that cared about their employees and created a healthy culture experienced far more favorable health care cost trends. He also emphasized the importance of treating each individual as a whole person instead of focusing solely on the individual's disease states and health risk factors.

Edington successfully translated his research on the linkages between health risks, as measured by health risk appraisals and biometric testing, into practical steps for companies, health plans, and other public and private organizations. In his landmark book, *Zero Trends: Health as a Serious Economic Strategy*, he defined five pillars for achieving a successful "culture of health" in organizations and communities. His subsequent book, *Shared Values Shared Results—Positive Organizational Health as a Win-Win Philosophy* brought a refreshing new vision for an organization's success.

Edington enjoyed working with organizations committed to reversing the unsustainable trend in rising health care costs and decreasing productivity measures while establishing themselves as

a best place to work. If a survey were taken of corporate benefit managers and healthcare decision makers, there is no question that Edington would be named as one of the most influential people whose research and teachings most impacted their approach to wellness and population health.

Dr Edington would frequently quote Albert Einstein: "We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them." He left us with an assignment—let's all go forward with an openness to new ways of thinking, new ways of seeing old problems, and new ways of solving them. Dr Dee Edington was a pioneer in the field of workplace wellness, and he continued as a thought leader, mentor, and friend to countless members of the global lifestyle medicine community until he passed away.

*Editor's Note: Dr. Dee Edington was a towering figure in the area of health promotion. His landmark research profoundly impacted corporate wellness programs throughout the United States and around the world. His emphasis on the power of daily habits and actions also significantly impacted the area of lifestyle medicine. Dr. Edington edited a superb health promotion section in the 3rd edition of my Lifestyle Medicine academic textbook. At the time of his untimely passing, he was hard at work on the health promotion section for the 4th edition. He was a kind gentleman, a dear friend, and a brilliant researcher. I will miss him greatly.

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of Lifestyle Medicine