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WellPoint ties members' health to employee bonuses

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NEW YORK (Reuters) - Health insurer WellPoint Inc. said on Tuesday it is beginning to gauge the health of its 34 million members using an index of measures, and is linking its employees' bonuses to progress in that index.

The company, which is the largest U.S. health insurer by membership, introduced a health index that it will apply to all of its insurance plans.

The index includes 20 different clinical areas, which involve prevention and screening, management of chronic diseases, clinical outcomes and patient safety.

For example, the company will measure whether diabetics are getting necessary eye exams, emergency room visits for asthmatics, breast-cancer screenings for women, and immunizations for children.

Five percent of bonuses for each of WellPoint's 42,000 employees will be linked to improvement in the health index, the company said.

"We're making a bold statement that we're going to improve the health of our members, and we're putting compensation of every ... WellPoint associate on the line to improve health," Chief Medical Officer Sam Nussbaum said.

If the company hits its predetermined goal for the index, all employees will earn that portion of the bonus. If it does not, none of its employees will gain that part of the bonus.

"We all make it, or we all don't," Nussbaum said.

Indianapolis-based WellPoint is a licensee of Blue Cross Blue Shield health plans, and administers Medicaid plans for low-income Americans and Medicare plans for the elderly. © Reuters 2007. All rights reserved.

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