

Expert Medical Intervention
in the **Energy Sector**

Executive Summary

Few industries have the far-reaching impact of the energy services industry. Crucial to the infrastructure and performance of societies worldwide, energy resources drive agriculture, manufacturing, housing, transportation, technology—virtually all aspects of the way we live and do business. In short, the energy industry powers everything from our global economies to our daily lives. This sector is in the midst of a major global transformation, one that has increased competition among companies, and tested organizations' ability to manage and balance these changes.¹ With an immense amount of pressure to stay ahead, energy companies are looking for new ways to keep employees healthy and engaged at work to help increase their competitive advantage and gain traction against an ever-evolving landscape.

What's inside:

- Challenges facing the energy sector today
- Recommendations and points for consideration
- Client and personal stories

Energy Sector: Key Themes



Because so much depends on energy, it is no surprise that the industry is extremely vigilant about avoiding hazards. Consequently, energy enterprises are continually seeking new ways to mitigate risk. This awareness extends to the workforce, where a “culture of safety” is the norm. Core to ensuring that employees are safe is making sure that they get the correct care and answers they need when faced with a medical condition. Getting the *right* answers is critical—nearly one-third of the \$2.7 trillion spent each year on health care in the U.S. is considered to be wasted dollars.ⁱⁱ Much of this is attributed to misdiagnosis and medical error. Misdiagnosis and chronic conditions can lead to employee distress, redundant or invasive tests, and causes a threat to employee health and well-being.

With Expert Medical Intervention You Can Expect To See:

REDUCED
ABSENTEEISM FOR
EMPLOYEES

IMPROVED
OUTCOMES FOR
EMPLOYEES

IMPROVED
EMPLOYEE
SATISFACTION AT
WORK

REDUCED
HEALTH CARE
SPENDING

Here, we discuss some of the challenges that the energy sector faces and how getting the right diagnosis and treatment can dramatically improve employee population health.

Challenge: Unplanned Absences

Employees facing health issues, whether their own or a family member's are understandably distracted at work. They may suffer from persistent symptoms, or experience anxiety about a sick loved one. This lapse in focus can be particularly harmful in the energy industry, where even small errors can have enormous consequences.

These employees may require time off for tests, x-rays, and special visits, temporarily disrupting the normal flow of production. Many need to stay home to care for a sick child or parent, and some are unable to work for weeks after a surgical treatment.ⁱⁱⁱ This can result in stress for other employees who must take on this additional responsibility in their absence. In these cases, the potential for error increases.

Challenge: Increasing Health Care Costs

The capital expenditures of the energy industry outdistance those of many other sectors. Billions of dollars are spent on technology, equipment, and other infrastructure and operational resources. With cost efficiency as a perpetual goal, energy companies are looking into ways to save. This includes looking into the ways in which health care spending can be optimized.

Absences not only result in decreased productivity and higher employee stress; they can also be very costly to employers. The cost of employee absence is not always tracked as carefully as other expenses such as benefits or salaries. Many employers believe that sick time is simply one of the costs of running a business, but unplanned and persistent absences carry hidden expenditures in overtime costs for replacement employees, as well as increased stress and lowered productivity of the overall workforce.

Challenge: Rural Access to Expertise

With recent great advances in technology, employee populations are able to communicate with teams thousands of miles away, from almost anywhere. Unfortunately, those in rural and remote areas may not have the same luxury when it comes to health care. These locations often lack access to medical specialists, causing employees to travel long distances to seek care. Alarmingly, this population tends to be the least healthy. Rural adults are more likely than their urban counterparts to smoke and be physically inactive, leading to health complications and lowered life expectancy. In cases where travel is impossible or restricted, remote access to medical expertise can relieve this burden.

Summary and Recommendations

With an expert second opinion program, employees gain access to the best medical minds in the world, no matter where they work or reside. Remote consultations give employees the peace of mind that comes with knowing they are making the right medical decision. Energy companies that implement second opinion programs gain many advantages highlighted by:

- Fitting a benefits-rich culture, providing employees with an invaluable resource when faced with medical uncertainty.
- Improved clinical quality and outcomes.
- A valued benefit that impacts safety and mitigates risk.
- A healthier, more productive workforce, with reduced absenteeism.

When built around the employer's benefits and culture, a medical advisory service and second opinion program is effective in improving the safety and well-being of an employee population. Any energy employee can take advantage of a second opinion benefit: an engineer in an office, a field worker on an oil rig, or a lineman climbing a tower. In addition, the value it delivers can be applied across all industry segments. Implementing programs that deliver the right diagnosis and treatment helps keep employees healthy and focused. And healthy, focused employees are safer employees.

Client Case Study

Best Doctors partnered with a large U.S. oil and gas company to help improve medical outcomes within its employee population. They knew that medical coverage can be a challenge to understand, and that diagnoses and treatment options can be overwhelming. The client wanted to give employees the peace of mind that comes with receiving answers when faced with a medical condition.

Within the first year of implementation, the client achieved nearly double the expected participation, and an ROI of 1.33:1. The program resulted in a 96% satisfaction rate among members.

One member in particular had a history of intermittent nausea, vomiting, and abdominal discomfort for approximately 8 years. She had been treated by two gastroenterologists, and underwent numerous tests. Her gallbladder scan, an upper GI series, and CT scan of her abdomen and pelvis was normal. Her liver was found to be minimally enlarged. An upper endoscopy showed mild inflammation of her stomach lining, and biopsies were normal. A high number of mast cells, indicating an allergic response, were found in her gastrointestinal system. Her doctor started her on Cromolyn, Allegra and Carafate. Other treatment included acupuncture and medication for stress management, as the member noted that her symptoms worsened when under stress. She had temporary symptom improvement following a FODMAP diet restricting certain carbohydrates, but did not tolerate the limited dietary intake. She changed her diet to a low-histamine diet as well as tried a gluten-free and dairy-free diet. Despite treatment, her intermittent gastrointestinal symptoms persist. The member reached out to Best Doctors to confirm her diagnosis and obtain treatment options.

The Best Doctors Expert stated that the member was most likely suffering from Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) exacerbated by stress, and that there is not enough evidence to support an overactive immune disorder causing mast cell activation.

In 2014, The Client's Program Resulted In:

52%
CHANGE IN
DIAGNOSIS

78%
CHANGE IN
TREATMENT

100%
MEMBER
SATISFACTION

Client Case Study Continued

Best Doctors' review of the pathology findings indicated mast cell findings were within the normal spectrum, and that the current medication regimen was unnecessary. The Expert recommended that the IBS be managed by adhering to a low FODMAP diet as previously recommended, and discontinue the low histamine diet. The Expert also recommended stress management counseling, and potentially antispasmodics in the future.

The member was grateful for the Expert report, and plans to stop taking the ineffective medications. She will discuss the findings with her gastroenterologist, and work on implementing the new treatment plan.



Personal Stories

After years of lower back pain, an energy industry employee in his late 50s was diagnosed with moderate to severe degenerative disc disease. His treatment plan included repeated steroid injections, but after worsening pain and lowered function, his doctor recommended surgery. The member reached out to Best Doctors to gain a better understanding of his condition and treatment options.

The Best Doctors Expert attributed the member's back pain to degenerative arthritis of the disc and joints of the spine. The Expert also noted narrowing and a protruding herniated disc in the lumbar region, along with another herniated disc above it. The Expert advised against the proposed surgery, recommending that the member manage his pain with additional injections, along with the help of a Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation physician, non-impact cardio exercises (i.e. swimming) and core-strengthening exercise.

The member was able to avoid the high risks associated with spinal surgery and regain lost function. This resulted in cost savings of over \$63,000.

In another case, a female energy employee in her late 40s was struggling with a surgery issue. She had been diagnosed with diverticulosis, a condition where small bulging sacks or pouches form on the inner lining of the intestine. Her physician recommended a course of antibiotics, along with bowel resection surgery.

The Best Doctors Expert confirmed the diagnosis of diverticulosis, but also noted inflammation of the stomach lining from anti-inflammatory medications. The Expert recommended stopping the anti-inflammatory medication and starting on a probiotic to restore normal intestinal microorganisms. He also recommended medication to relax the intestines during meals and at bedtime. He recommended against surgery.

Even with the addition of new medication, the costs avoided totaled \$94,400.

What Energy Employees Say About Best Doctors

“This was a really **great experience**. My contact was very helpful and friendly. I would recommend this service to anyone and have already told my friends and family about my experience.”

“Exceptional. This really **exceeded my expectations.**”

“Excellent! I have discussed the report with my doctor and he agrees with the recommendations. I am very glad I went through this process and have recommended this to a co-worker.”

“Truly wonderful. The staff is extremely professional and helpful. They took the time to answer all of my questions thoughtfully and I feel much more **confident about my health.**”

“The **best experience** so far. I will not hesitate to use this service again if the need arises.”

“Best Doctors is one of the **most valuable programs** I’ve used in my life.”

“This is an **outstanding service** that a lot of associates could benefit from. The people on the other end of the line genuinely care.”

- ¹Booz Allen. 2015. Booz Allen Releases Annual Energy Sector Trends for 2015.
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About Best Doctors

Best Doctors, Inc. is the trusted global medical resource for ensuring that individuals have the right diagnosis and treatment, helping to dramatically improve the quality of care and reduce costs. Founded in 1989 by two Harvard Medical School professors, Best Doctors serves more than 700 employers, health plans, and other clients, touching more than 30 million members in countries all across the world. Best Doctors has received accolades from the media and the medical community as the leading organization for connecting patients with the best medical care. www.BestDoctors.com

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