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Business

Goodwin Procter offers family caregiver benefit

Service helps workers access information for the elderly, disabled

By Sacha Pfeiffer
GLOBE STAFF

Responding to the needs of its baby boomer employees, Goodwin Procter, a national law firm headquartered in Boston, is rolling out an unusual new benefit this

week: free, round-the-clock access to a telephone support center that provides information on services for the elderly, the disabled, and the family members who care for them.

The benefit is aimed at the so-called sandwich generation, which often finds itself caring not only for young children, but also for aging parents.

Unlike typical employee assistance programs that address issues as wide-ranging as substance abuse and personal fitness,

Goodwin Procter's consulting service will focus strictly on challenges facing family caregivers.

Staffed by registered nurses and geriatric social workers, it will help employees navigate the complex maze of medical and social services for the elderly and disabled, including housing, transportation, insurance, nutrition, and nursing care.

It will also offer assessments and referrals, and will field questions such as how to persuade aging parents to move into as-

sisted living or give up their driver's licenses.

In turn, the firm hopes the service will improve productivity and reduce turnover, since the time demands and emotional toll of caregiving can have a deleterious effect

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BALANCING ACT

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Hub law firm offers caregiver benefit

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on workplace performance.

"With our workforce facing the issue of elderly people living longer, it became apparent to us that our employees could use a resource that would help them not only with issues facing their families and children, but with care they have to provide to elderly and disabled relatives," said Goodwin Procter's human resources director, Ann Lamson, who estimates that between a quarter and a third of the firm's 1,700 employees are older than 45.

About 20 percent of companies nationwide now offer eldercare referral services, according to the 2007 Benefits Survey by the Society for Human Resource Management in Alexandria, Va.

Goodwin Procter employees may make an unlimited number of calls and receive an unlimited amount of telephone assistance from the support center.

They will also have access to support groups, workshops for caregivers, and a network of geriatric specialists and elder law attorneys. Additional services are available at the employee's expense, such as in-home consultations with geriatric specialists.

And the service is being offered not only to employees, but also to spouses and any other relatives who play a family caretaking role, including siblings and in-laws.

"Our objective is to keep employees productive," said John Paul Marosy, executive director of VNA Private Care, a for-profit arm of the Visiting Nurse Association of Boston that is providing the eldercare benefit to Goodwin Procter. "If that means providing support to other family members, then that gives peace of mind to employees and that's fulfilling our goal."

Sacha Pfeiffer can be reached at pfeiffer@globe.com.



VNA Private Care

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OF BOSTON & AFFILIATES

(781) 431-1484 ■ www.vnaprivatecare.com