



Expatriates Require Different Benefits

Overview

As the world continues to grow as a global marketplace, the needs of the globally mobile workforce continue to develop as well. Some of your employees may be abroad for a few weeks, while others may relocate for years. No matter the length of stay or location, employers need to understand the difference between “*domestic*” health insurance coverage and those plans designed for the “*expatriate*” employees in your firm.

AT RISK:

Domestic health insurance plans are ill-equipped to handle international issues such as cultural expectations, language barriers, transportation to U.S., plan administration, and currency exchanges.

Domestic Policies & International Challenges

Often, employers operate under the assumption that their domestic health care coverage will provide the same level of benefits for their international employee population. However, covering the global workforce presents new challenges and obstacles that domestic carriers are ill-equipped to handle, such as cultural expectations, language barriers, transportation to U.S. health care centers, plan administration, and currency exchanges.

In addition to offering solutions for these potential complications, an international health insurer can also work with your employees to keep them healthy while on assignment through wellness programs that address chronic conditions, pharmacy management, and international employee assistance.

A domestic plan abroad may not only provide insufficient benefits, but may not comply with local laws and regulations due to the unique nature of each country.

For example, there has been an increasing trend in complications for such regions as the Middle East, which subjects international employees to host country laws regarding health care benefits. A domestic insurer’s benefits plan in these countries would not only be non-compliant, but may increase the risk of penalties and

finances for the employer. Penalties for non-compliance vary and may include criminal imprisonment, as well as corporate and personal fines.

Bridging Cultural Differences

Understanding the cultural differences in a country of assignment also plays an important role in the success of an international employee.

For example, in the domestic health care market, co-payments and deductibles are widely accepted, yet doctors and hospitals in other countries are not accustomed to such a system of payment from patients and insurance companies. Working with an international health insurer to protect employees while abroad will ultimately contribute to the success of the assignment.

ACTION:

Assess workforce activity and travel procedures to determine company and employee exposure to risks created by international medical care issues.

Before Going Global...

Before sending employees abroad while insured under a domestic benefits plan, employers should ask the following questions:

- *Can employees access a global network of preferred doctors and hospitals?*
- *Is the benefits plan compliant with host country regulations?*
- *Does the benefits plan maintain an alliance with reputable insurance carriers throughout the world?*
- *Do employees have 24/7/365 toll-free access to multilingual, trained and in-house staff?*
- *Can claims be settled directly with international doctors or hospitals?*
- *Do employees have access to online, multilingual claim forms?*
- *Can claims be reimbursed in multiple currencies?*

If you answer “no” to any of these questions or are unsure of the answer, consult with an employee benefits advisor experienced in coverage plans for expatriate employees.