

Technical guide to technology and workplace wellbeing

Part of the REBA technical training series



In association with



Simplyhealth

Editor's welcome



Welcome to REBA and Simplyhealth's guide to technology and wellbeing at work.

Everyday technologies such as smartphones and wearable devices are already part of a new era of digital wellbeing that will predict and prevent health conditions in innovative ways. Pioneers of digital health are using that information to 'join the dots' between collecting personal data, sickness prevention, and identifying suitable treatments where needed.

And that's just the start. 'Big picture' medical data has the potential to democratise care and even to eliminate diseases in the future. Technology could facilitate everything from creating replacement body parts using 3D printers, through to predicting how long we will live based on our health behaviours and genetic data. Our homes could become the healthcare hubs of the future, offering everything from wellness monitoring to remote care for chronic conditions.

Where do employers fit in the future of digital healthcare? They can already act as facilitators, offering access to digital services such as virtual GPs and as responsible curators of employees' health data. Employers are also ideally placed to improve the health of their employees through building a positive working culture, introducing access to health technologies and demonstrating long-lasting commitment to staff wellbeing.

Doing this successfully is about having the right skills, policies and culture in place. In this guide we explore some essential building blocks that will help employers make the most of the new opportunities technology presents both today and for the future.

Maggie Williams
Editor



Contents

Sponsor's welcome	3
The big picture	4
Using technology and data to build a wellbeing strategy	6
How will AI and machine learning shape the future of health at work?	7
Ways to build an inclusive approach to health at work	8
Some common health issues – and how technology can help	9
Need to know: data security and ethics	11
Quiz	12
Who we are	13

This report was devised by Debi O'Donovan and Phil Hayne of REBA in association with Simplyhealth.

The guide was edited by Maggie Williams, written by Sam Barrett and designed by SallyannDesign.

© REBA 2019. Published by Reba Group Ltd, 7c Vera Road, London SW6 6RW United Kingdom.



Sponsor's comment



Advances in technology are rapidly disrupting the way we see, and take care of, our health. It is helping us better understand our own health, improving awareness of our wellbeing, and changing how we access health services and advice. And for employers, technology provides many opportunities for smarter health and wellbeing support.

Central to our values at Simplyhealth is preventative health. We firmly believe that prevention is better than cure. We work with businesses to help them adopt a preventative approach to health, in turn encouraging their employees to look after all aspects of their health and wellbeing.

Technology can be a great enabler in this area, and solutions for health and wellbeing are increasingly being designed with our digital lives in mind. Virtual GP services are growing in popularity, and many counselling services offer an online option for speaking to a health professional. These solutions can often be more convenient for people to access than traditional services.

As well as this, technology can help us understand our health status and monitor symptoms. Wearable technology, things like Apple watches and Fitbits, can track heart rate, sleep quality or physical activity, and spot changes.

Any changes, such as poor sleep or elevated heart rate, could point to underlying health issues like stress or anxiety. Knowing this means employers can more effectively signpost employees to help, before problems escalate.

Flexible working is another key benefit that technology enables. Connectivity is easier than ever, with instant messaging, file sharing and video calling. And most importantly working flexibly allows us to structure our working hours around personal commitments, helping to redress work-life balance. Indeed, where causes of stress at work include workloads and long hours impacting work-life balance, flexible working options are used to reduce workplace stress in 69% of organisations¹.

Where technology has many great benefits for workplace wellbeing, it can also have negative effects. In fact, the top three negative effects identified by organisations include; the inability to switch off out of work hours, stress when technology fails, and that it results in less face-to-face interaction¹.

It's crucial that employers put measures in place to mitigate these negative impacts. For example, setting clear expectations for acceptable times to send work emails or make phone calls, and keeping in regular contact with remote workers can help.

Forward-thinking employers will grasp the opportunities technology provides for proactive health and wellbeing with both hands.

I hope this guide to technology and workplace wellbeing offers a good starting point for incorporating the benefits of technology into your wellbeing strategy, and introducing it into your workforce to better support their health.

Pam Whelan

Director of Corporate at Simplyhealth



¹ CIPD/Simplyhealth Health and Well-being at Work 2018 report

The big picture

Supporting employee health and wellbeing is a must, driving up productivity and engagement. With the workplace changing, technology has an important role to play in keeping employees healthy.

All manner of change is taking place. For starters, thanks to the removal of the default retirement age, the workforce is getting older, sometimes spanning as many as five generations.

This presents challenges to employers. As well as an increased risk of age-related conditions, older employees are more likely to find themselves having to juggle work with caring for parents or partners.

Health risks are also changing. More sedentary lifestyles mean conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and musculoskeletal problems are an increasing concern. For example, the number of people living with diabetes has doubled in the last 20 years and there are 2.3 million people in the UK living with coronary heart disease. Likewise, mental health issues are coming to the fore. According to the Health and Safety Executive, stress, depression or anxiety accounted for 15.4 million lost working days in 2017/18.

The way we work also influences employee health and wellbeing. Remote working has benefits for employee and employer, but it needs to be managed appropriately to ensure employees feel supported and don't miss out on the social benefits associated with coming into work.

There's also increasing pressure on employers to take more responsibility for employee health and wellbeing. The recent government paper, Prevention is Better than Cure, highlighted the role that all parties, including employers, have to play in improving the nation's health. Similarly, with uncertainties around staffing after the UK leaves the EU, it increases the importance of offering a package that will attract, retain and engage employees.

While technology is helping to shape how we work, it can also play a key role in an employer's health and wellbeing strategy. Services such as virtual GPs, online counselling and mentoring services, and health portals give employees fast access to the information and advice they need. In addition, tracking devices including wearables and sensors can help them understand their health and make changes where necessary. It can even make getting healthy fun, with step challenges turning fitness into a game.

The future will bring even more innovation into this space. Artificial intelligence and machine learning will lead to faster delivery, greater personalisation and more focus on prevention.

Integrating this technology into a workplace health and wellbeing programme is not without its challenges – especially around the use of employees' personal data – but it's a step that more and more employers are taking.



Using technology and data to build a wellbeing strategy

Building a health and wellbeing strategy that meets the needs of your workforce is key to its success. By providing employees with initiatives that help them with their personal health challenges, they're much more likely to engage and make the necessary improvements.

Technology can help you gain the necessary insight. By collecting and analysing employee data, you can see where there are potential issues and direct your health and wellbeing initiatives towards them.

There are plenty of different sources of data available. As well as sickness absence data, which shows you the health issues that stop employees coming to work, claims data from health benefit providers can be useful.

It's also worth looking at staff surveys and, if you offer voluntary or flexible benefits, take-up figures. For instance, a low take-up of heavily subsidised gym membership could indicate that something's preventing employees from exercising.

Even data from your canteen or vending machines could help to shape your health and wellbeing programme. That mid-afternoon splurge on chocolate could indicate a need for more education – and options – around healthy eating.

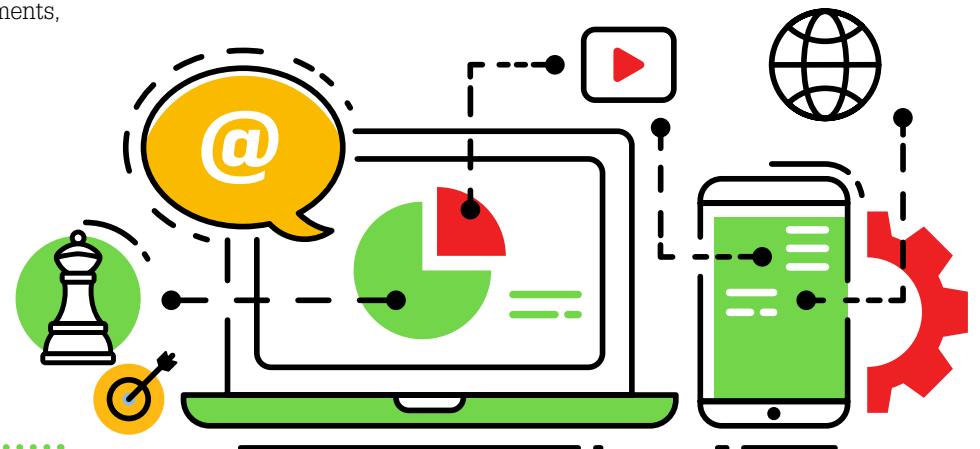
An online health risk assessment can help you gain more scientific analysis of the workforce's health and wellbeing. These run through all areas of an employee's health, from body mass index to sleep and stress levels. And, while the employee receives personalised tips on how to make improvements, employers get an aggregated report showing the overall state of health in their organisation.

It's also worth linking wellbeing to broader business goals, as this can help to secure funding and support for your health and wellbeing programme. As an example, by demonstrating how a flu vaccination programme had resulted in less absence, an HR manager could secure additional funding to roll vaccinations out to more employees.

These broader business goals could include anything from increasing productivity and reducing staff turnover to building a more diverse workforce – all of which can be reflected in health and wellbeing initiatives.

Tips

- Even if the data points to a health problem such as smoking, inactivity or poor diet, don't assume employees want to change.
- Consider a targeted staff survey to check the validity of your data analysis and ensure support for your initiatives.
- Use data from your marketing campaign to build the most effective communications strategy. This can help you pinpoint the best time and type of communication to send.
- Regularly review the data to see if your health and wellbeing programme has resulted in any improvements and to stay ahead of any emerging health issues.



The workforce in numbers

1.2 million people aged 65 plus in employment between October and December 2018

1 in 4 people in the UK will experience a mental health problem every year

1.6 million employees regularly worked from home in 2017

3 million plus people juggle care with work, with one in five carers giving up work altogether

[Find out more here](#)

[Find out more here](#)

[Find out more here](#)

[Find out more here](#)

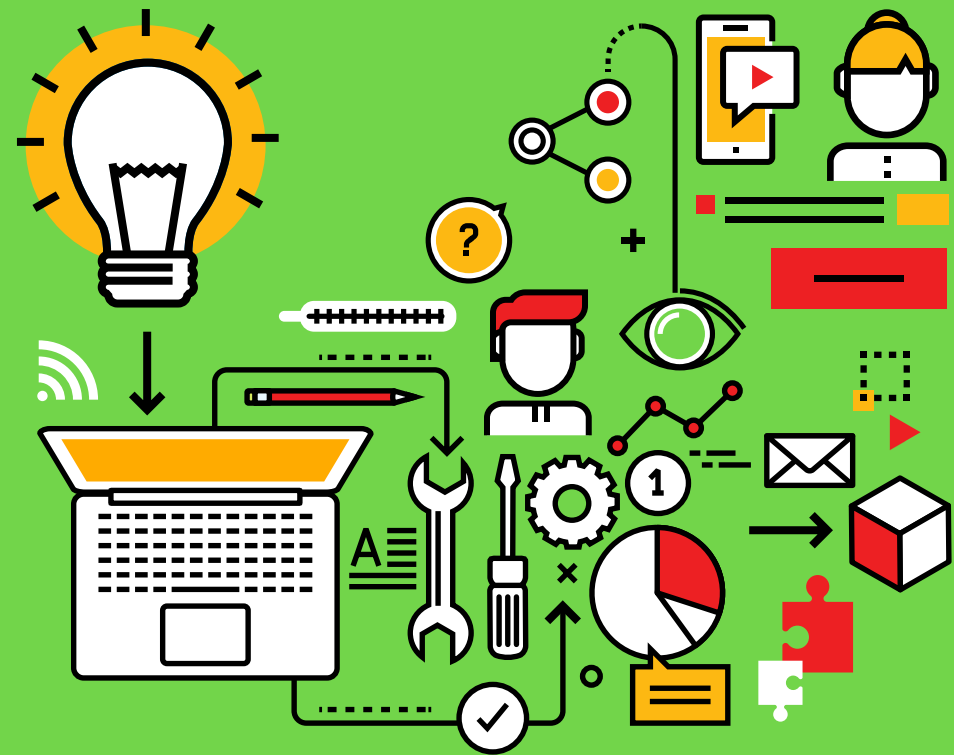
How to manage the downsides of technology

Technology is a force for good in the workplace, taking on some of the more mundane tasks and enabling us to complete work faster, but it also comes with a number of downsides that need to be carefully managed.

It's spawned the 'always on' work culture, leading to mental health issues as we find it increasingly difficult to switch off. Similarly, our reliance on technology in the workplace means it can be incredibly stressful if something does go wrong.

More automation in the workplace is also making us increasingly sedentary, with this inactivity linked to health issues such as obesity, cancer, heart disease and diabetes.

- Ensuring employees are in control of technology, and not the other way round, is essential.
- Setting expectations around working hours and when emails should be sent will encourage employees to switch off and enjoy their downtime.
- It's also important to prioritise health and wellbeing in the workplace.
- Adopting initiatives such as walking meetings, lunchtime walking and running groups, and stair challenges will help to offset the risks associated with inactivity.



How will AI and machine learning shape the future of health at work?

From the recommendations on your media streaming service, to your bank's fraud detection, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning are shaping many aspects of our lives. They're also set to transform healthcare, with benefits for the workplace.

Significant developments are already taking place in the healthcare market. Among these are Google AI's automated detection algorithm, which can identify even the smallest instances of breast cancer metastasis in biopsies. Google is also working with healthcare companies to explore how machine learning could predict future healthcare events, which could inform prevention strategies.

Drug research is benefitting from these technologies too. As an example, IBM Watson Health is using AI to support researchers looking for a cure for conditions such as Parkinson's and Motor Neurone Disease.

The workplace is also benefitting from AI and machine learning. As an example, by analysing thousands of pieces of health data, some virtual healthcare services are able to assess an employee's symptoms and recommend a care package. For minor ailments, this can be faster, more convenient and bypasses lengthy wait times.

AI-powered chatbots are also transforming the way mental health support is delivered. These are able to guide people through stressful situations and teach them the necessary skills to improve resilience.

This technology can also support wellbeing apps. By using machine learning to understand an employee's personality and how they're motivated, an app can recommend the most appropriate ways to make health improvements.

And this is just the beginning. As AI becomes more advanced – and more accepted – it will be able to use the data from employees' wearables alongside medical sources to predict health issues and provide the necessary support to prevent them. That could include signposting to relevant health information or suggestions of ways to reduce risk factors like poor diet or sedentary lifestyles.

The benefits to employers are huge. As well as ensuring employees are treated quickly, which can reduce absence and insurance claims, there is huge potential to support and improve employee health.

There are cost implications, with most new technology coming with a premium price tag. However, as these services are often scalable, costs come down rapidly. In addition, employers can reap the benefit of having a healthier and happier workforce.

Keeping an eye on the latest developments in this space is sensible. With technology moving fast, providing the latest health and wellbeing services will help an employer attract and retain the best employees.



Ways to build an inclusive approach to health at work

Building an inclusive approach to health and wellbeing at work is a must. As well as delivering the benefits associated with a healthier workforce, it'll also help you reach those employees who aren't already leading healthy lifestyles.

To achieve this approach, data is king. By analysing the workforce's health data, you can see which health and wellbeing issues need attention.

As well as identifying common issues, there may also be some that are specific to different locations or departments. For instance, a company may find its warehouse staff get plenty of activity while those in its customer support centre are more desk-bound and would benefit from initiatives around exercise and healthy eating.

Where this is the case, as well as the overarching company programme, it can be worth allocating budget to individual teams or locations to enable them to tackle more specific issues.

It's also important to think about the types of workers within your organisation. Adding forums and using social media can help remote and part-time workers feel part of a fitness campaign, even if it means they jog round their local park rather than with the company's running group.

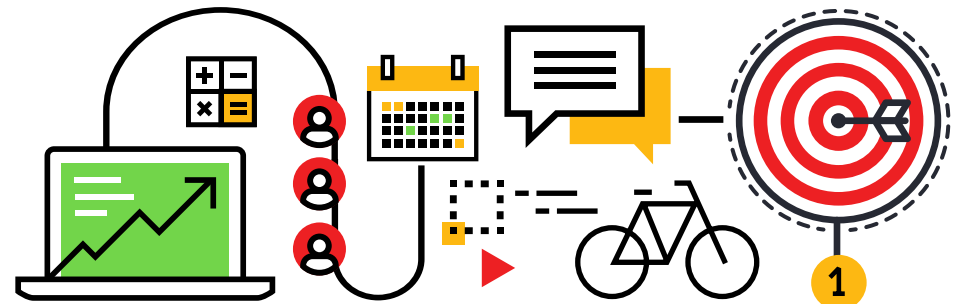
Think about how you can reach every employee when you introduce initiatives too. Unless you work for an athletics club, diving in with a half marathon running programme is only likely to appeal to a very limited number of employees. Offering a range of activities such as walking, netball and even gardening groups can enable more employees to enjoy being active.

It's also worth getting support from other parties. Developing partnerships with charities, your benefit providers and other health-related organisations, can broaden your programme. Similarly, seek out health and wellbeing best practice examples and case studies, available from professional and industry bodies, and health benefit providers.

Look internally too. As well as asking employees what they'd like to see in the company health and wellbeing programme, get support from senior management too. Seeing the boss taking their lunchbreak walking round the park or talking openly about a mental health issue can be the example that really engages the workforce.

The dos and don'ts of measuring success

- ✓ Do monitor employee health-related data, from sickness absence rates and take-up of gym membership, to employee engagement figures and productivity.
- ✓ Do check take-up on a department, location and even manager basis. Poor take-up could be down to a lack of communication.
- ✓ Do assess data regularly and be prepared to change initiatives to keep your programme fresh and exciting.
- ✗ Don't expect your health and wellbeing initiatives to be an overnight success. Reaching out to employees aren't used to exercising and making lifestyle changes takes time.
- ✗ Don't be afraid to ask employees what they think. If an initiative doesn't appeal, ask them what they would like to see.
- ✓ Do look for change in the workplace. A successful programme will create a buzz among employees.



Some common health issues – and how technology can help

Technology is yet to find a cure for the common cold, but it can provide employees with valuable support for a wide range of physical and mental health issues.

Dispensing health information and advice through an app is becoming increasingly popular. This isn't surprising: as most of us have a close relationship with our smartphones, it's support that's rarely more than a few feet away.

Providing support through an app can also increase usage. This is particularly the case for mental health support, with employee assistance programmes recognising that some people prefer the anonymity and convenience of online chat.

Some of these apps will also interact with employees, using nudge technology to help them adopt healthier behaviours. Nudges could include getting up from their desk and having a walk; making healthier food choices; and even switching off their phone and getting some sleep.

Wearables are also transforming health and wellbeing. As well as tracking basics such as activity, sleep and diet, the latest wave of wearables will also monitor factors such as an employee's breathing patterns and heart rate to give an early warning that they might be at risk of mental or physical health issues.

These devices are also helping employees manage health conditions. For instance, by wearing a small sensor on their skin, flash glucose monitoring allows people with diabetes to track their glucose levels through the day.

Workplace sensors can also support a healthy workforce. By monitoring everything from the air quality to the light and temperature, adjustments can be made to ensure the optimum working environment.

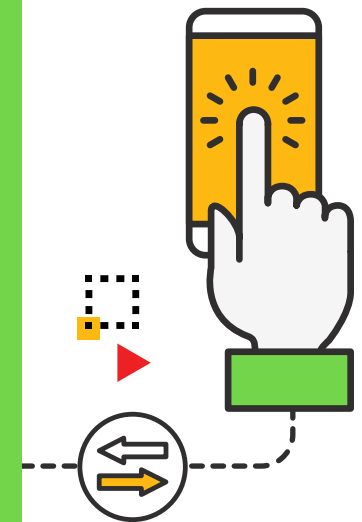
Sensors can even help reduce musculoskeletal problems. As an example, Ford has used body tracking technology on its Valencia production line to design more ergonomic workstations and help employees improve their posture.

And with health and wellbeing technology getting smarter, even the common cold's days may be numbered.

Rehabilitation and workplace design

Technology is revolutionising workplace rehabilitation, supporting employees returning to work after longer periods of illness. As well as helping to make many tasks less physically demanding, these are some of the innovations that are making the return to work easier:

- **Virtual reality** – employees can be trained to carry out physical tasks in a computer-generated environment that simulates the real world. This can work well after an accident or stroke where it may be necessary to relearn an activity.
- **Internet enabled hearing aids** – as well as enabling the wearer to connect with their smartphone so they know when they receive an email or message, these also collect data from the hearing aids so they can be optimised for different situations and environments.
- **Smart monitoring** – smartwatches and other wearables can be used to track changes, such as glucose levels for diabetes or movement for epileptic seizures, giving the employee an early warning that their health needs attention and their doctor plenty of data to assess the effectiveness of their treatment plan.





You get more than grape expectations with Denplan

With Denplan employees can claim back the costs of routine and unexpected dental treatment as soon as they need it. What's more, they have the flexibility to choose between NHS dental treatment and private dentist care.

You'll get all the support you need through tailored marketing to help you promote oral health and Denplan to your employees, and dedicated account management to take care of the ongoing maintenance of your plan.

That's the world of Denplan for you.

0300 100 1188
team@simplyhealth.co.uk
simplyhealth.co.uk/businesses



Denplan Ltd, trading as Simplyhealth, is an Appointed Representative of Simplyhealth Access for arranging and administering dental insurance. Simplyhealth Access is incorporated in England and Wales, registered no. 183035 and is authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority. Denplan Ltd is regulated by the Jersey Financial Services Commission for General Insurance Mediation Business. Denplan Ltd only arranges insurance underwritten by Simplyhealth Access. Premiums received by Denplan Ltd are held by us as an agent of the insurer. Denplan Ltd is registered in England No. 1981238. The registered offices for these companies is Hambleden House, Waterloo Court, Andover, Hampshire SP10 1LQ.

Need to know: data security and ethics

Technology has the potential to transform workplace health and wellbeing. But, with many of these services dependent on employees sharing sensitive data, a robust data security strategy is essential.

It's also a legal requirement. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which came into force in May 2018, introduced strict rules around collecting and processing employees' personal data. Gaining their consent to collect their data is a must.

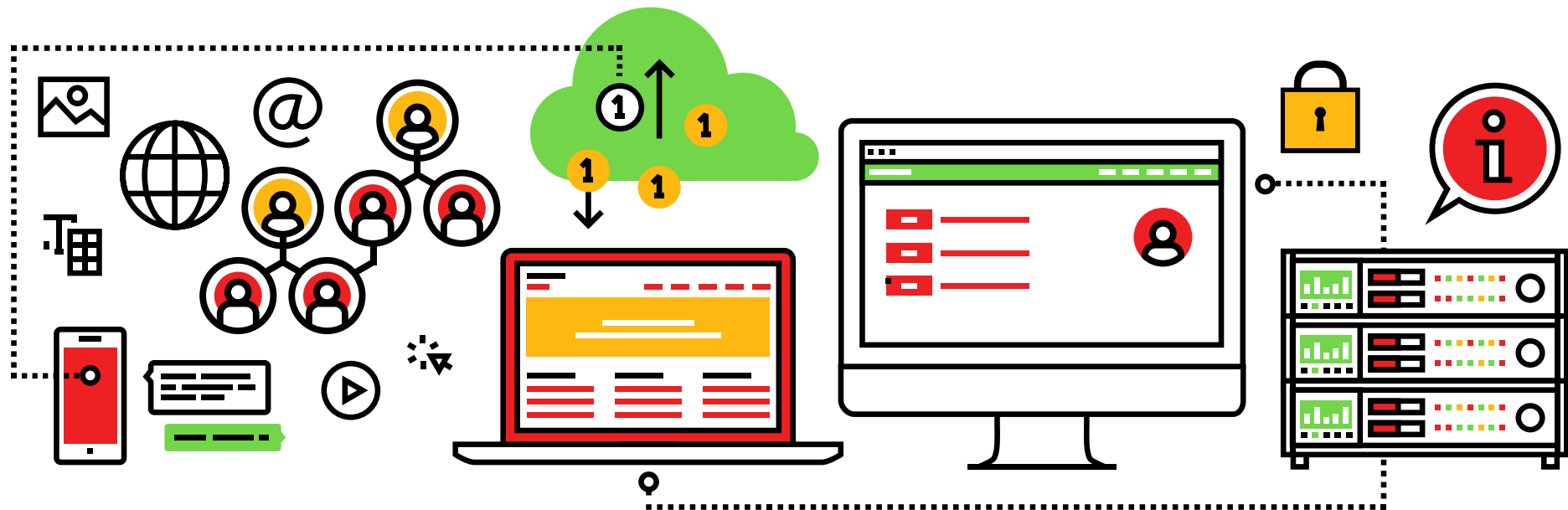
The rules also put additional onus on companies to hold personal data securely, most notably in the form of a fine that could be up to €20 million or 4% of the firm's annual global turnover.

While these rules – and the potential financial penalty – may make employers balk at the thought of collecting employees' data, it's rarely an issue with health and wellbeing technology. Rather than holding the data themselves, the technology provider will usually do this on the employer's behalf. This means it's only necessary for the employer to check the provider has the appropriate security in place.

The way the data is reported back to the employer can also calm employee nerves. Although employers receive management information to help them target workplace health issues, this is only provided where data sets are sufficiently large to guarantee employee anonymity.

Putting these details into your data security policy and guidelines is important but it's also sensible to communicate this to employees. Outlining that data is held securely and confidentially, rather than providing them with a lengthy corporate policy, will help to win their trust.

And this employee confidence can be further strengthened by explaining why you're collecting their health data. Understanding it's for the benefit of their health and wellbeing, rather than part of a snooping exercise, is essential.



Quiz

1. How many generations are currently in the workplace?

- A Three
 - B Four
 - C Five
 - D Six
-

2. How many people aged 65 were in employment between May and July 2016?

- A None
 - B 73
 - C 1.19 million
 - D 3 million
-

3. Which of the following can help an employer identify workforce health issues?

- A Sickness absence data
 - B Health insurance claims data
 - C Online health risk assessments
 - D All of these
-

4. Artificial Intelligence is being used to

- A Find a cure for baldness
 - B Train the over 50s to run faster
 - C Predict future healthcare events
 - D Make smoking less appealing
-

5. What involvement should senior managers have with a company health and wellbeing programme?

- A Get involved and set an example for colleagues
 - B Ignore it – it's better that employees see them working
 - C Select the health and wellbeing initiatives they want for the programme
 - D None – it's for the employees
-

6. How can nudge technology change employees' health behaviours?

- A By gently manipulating their stomach muscles so they feel fuller for longer.
 - B By reminding them to behave in a healthy way
 - C By prodding the soles of their feet until they go for a walk
 - D By advertising gym memberships and sportswear to them
-

7. What is flash glucose monitoring?

- A A light that flashes when glucose levels drop too low
 - B A sensor that allows a diabetic to monitor their glucose levels throughout the day
 - C An alarm that goes off when glucose levels are too high
 - D A service for diabetics that is still under development
-

8. Why has motor manufacturer Ford used body tracking technology on its production line in Valencia?

- A To ensure employees only take the permitted lunch break
 - B To prevent them getting sunburnt in the summer months
 - C To design more ergonomic workstations and improve employees' posture
 - D To ensure employees eat a balanced diet
-

9. What does GDPR stand for?

- A General Data Protection Regulation
 - B General Data Privacy Regulation
 - C Good Data Practice Requirements
 - D Generally Deleting Public Records
-

10. What type of management information do health and wellbeing companies provide to employers?

- A The names of employees who have health issues
 - B The names of employees who aren't taking part in their service
 - C Anonymised trend data
 - D The names of employees who have used the service the most
-

1. C, 2. C, 3. D, 4. C, 5. A, 6. B, 7. B, 8. C, 9. A, 10. C

Quiz: The answers

Who we are

About our sponsor: Simplyhealth

We've been providing cost-effective, accessible and manageable health cash plans for 145 years. Our market-leading products help businesses demonstrate real commitment to the maintenance of their employees' health, wellbeing and everyday performance.

What Simplyhealth does:

Our health cash plans enable businesses to look after their employees, and make it easy for people to maintain their health and wellbeing, so they can look after the business.

We offer two types of preventative health cash plans:

- **Optimise:** our health plan, covering a range of treatments including visits to the optician, dentist, 24/7 GP services and more
- **Denplan:** our dental plan, covering all clinically necessary treatments, routine examinations, hygiene treatments, plus cover for accidents and emergencies

In 2017, Simplyhealth and Denplan united under one Simplyhealth brand and today we're proud to be the UK's leading provider of health cash plans, Denplan dental payment plans and pet health plans.

Contact Simplyhealth:



+44 (0)300 100 1188

team@simplyhealth.co.uk

Website: www.simplyhealth.co.uk/business

Simplyhealth is a trading name of Simplyhealth Access, which is authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority.

About us: Reward & Employee Benefits Association

REBA is the professional networking community for reward and benefits practitioners. We make members' working lives easier by saving you time, money and effort through sharing experience, ideas, data and insight with each other. We help members to pursue best practice, increase professionalism in the industry and prepare for upcoming changes. REBA lobbies government on members' behalf.

What REBA does:

- Runs regular conferences and networking events
- Produces benchmarking research, insight & data reports and analysis
- Curates the information you need to know, both online and in our weekly email
- Helps with supplier shortlisting and research

Contact REBA:



■ **Debi O'Donovan**, founder: debi.odonovan@reba.global

■ **Phil Hayne**, partner: phil.hayne@reba.global or 0771 466 0857

Website: www.reba.global

REBA technical training series: Simplyhealth technical guide to technology and workplace wellbeing

is published by



www.reba.global

In association with



August 2019