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Domestic Partner Benefits

Baptist Hospital is a 360-bed facility in a large facility in the southeastern United States. Recently, the human resource management director, Joan Collins, has noted a higher than average employee turnover among nurses and other clinical professionals such as occupational therapist, physical therapist, and laboratory technologist. She is concerned that Baptist Hospital is losing good employees to other hospitals in the metropolitan region that offer more liberal domestic partner benefits. In fact, the hospital does not recognize such partners and provides no health benefits to them.

Most large companies in the region do offer such domestic partner benefits. For their purposes, they typically define a "domestic partner" as a person over 18 who shares living quarters with another adult in an exclusive committed relationship in which the partners are responsible for each other's common welfare. A standard definition typically includes requirements concerning a minimum age, a requirement that the couples live together, financial interdependence, a committed relationship, and a non-blood relative. Before such benefits can be provided, these companies typically require a signed and notarized affidavit specifying these requirements must be signed by both domestic partners and witnessed by a notary.

Collins has also done some research that indicates that those companies providing domestic partner benefits experience lower health benefit costs. The reason is that many unmarried heterosexual partners or homosexual partners do not have children and therefore such unions utilize fewer health services. Her research also showed that as a result of ongoing lawsuits in this area, many more employers may be forced to offer domestic partner benefits in the future.

While Collins is convinced that such a change in health benefits would be advantageous to the company, particularly in terms of recruiting and retaining employees, she is concerned that the hospital's culture is socially conservative. Consequently, she feels that the CEO, the executive team, and the board of directors may be less enthusiastic about implementing such a change than she is. Collins is therefore uncertain as to how to proceed and has asked your instructor for advice. Your instructor has presented the case to the class but has changed the name of the institution so that students will not know the identity of the facility.

QUESTIONS

1. Would you recommend that Joan Collins bring this issue before the CEO and the board of directors and recommend implementation? Why or why not?
2. If you believe that Collins should recommend implementation of domestic partner health benefits, what are the potential benefits to Baptist Hospital, and how would she document these?
3. What are the potential disadvantages to the hospital, and what steps should she recommend to address these potential disadvantages?