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Want to Quit Smoking? Try the Internet

*Online Health Coaching Helps Employees Kick the Habit and
Companies Reduce Health Care Costs*

CINCINNATI – (November 15, 2006) – Employers frustrated with rising health care costs are asking employees to quit smoking or face higher health care premiums. But often, increased premiums, which vary by company, are dropped if smokers attend cessation programs provided by their employers.

One company, the oldest mutual insurer of automobiles in the nation, turned to an online health-coaching program, MyHealthCoach.com, to help its employees kick the habit. The results were surprisingly successful.

One-third of employees who used the MyHealthCoach.com online coaching program quit smoking. Research suggests that the average annual cost to employers in medical care and lost productivity is \$3,391 per smoker.¹

During the three-month period, employees worked with their health coach to create a personalized action plan to quit smoking. Many employees also factored other goals into their action plan, including weight loss, lowering cholesterol, improved nutritional habits and stress reduction. Employees could schedule online chat sessions with their coach or communicate via email or online journals. In addition to having a personal health coach, they also had access to information hand-picked by their coach specifically for them, including streaming videos, Web links and news articles.

“With health care costs on the rise, now is the perfect time for companies to improve the **effectiveness of wellness benefits** by incorporating online health-coaching programs into existing benefit plans,” said Sean Slovenski, president and CEO of Hummingbird Coaching, the company that created MyHealthCoach.com.

Online coaching programs promote long-term behavioral health changes that lead to healthier lifestyles, limiting the onset of chronic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, which account for more than 75 percent of the nation's \$1.4 trillion in medical care costs. Online coaching programs reduce the likelihood that employees will need costly medical treatment in the future. Near-term benefits of improved employee health include increased productivity and morale.

In addition to reducing health care costs, online health coaching is more effective than other forms of health interventions at helping a person to quit smoking. Although there are no controlled studies with regard to online smoking-cessation programs, three reports published in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research* indicate that online coaching can produce one-week quit rates of about 40 to 50 percent, comparable to many non-Internet smoking-cessation trials.²

About Hummingbird Coaching Services

Cincinnati-based Hummingbird Coaching Services has been providing a unique form of one-on-one health coaching since 1997. Using their proprietary coaching model and online delivery platform, Hummingbird provides coaching services to businesses and organizations such as Motorola, United Healthcare, the Leeza Gibbons Memory Foundation, and the Muhammad Ali Center.

Through its innovative technology platform and coaching programs, Hummingbird provides health, parenting and life coaching that drive real behavior change for individuals. For more information about Hummingbird Coaching, visit www.hummingbirdcoaching.com

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, April 12, 2002.

² Norman, C. (2004). CATCH-IT Report: evaluation of an internet-based smoking cessation program: lessons learned from a pilot study. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 6(4):e47