



Depression in the Workplace

Depression affects approximately one in 10 adults, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. As the No. 1 contributor to disability in the United States and Canada, it's one of the most costly conditions for American employers, according to the University of Michigan Depression Center, and is associated with more than \$44 billion in lost workplace productivity due to absenteeism and presenteeism.

Despite its profound effects in the workplace, depression rarely gets addressed. Unlike chronic conditions such as heart disease or diabetes, depression is often perceived as a sign of weakness, not a real condition, even though it's linked to biochemical, environmental and genetic factors, reports the U-M Depression Center.

Employees' Attitudes Towards Depression

- Often times a depressed employee will not seek treatment because they fear the affect it will have on their job and they are concerned about confidentiality.
- Many employees are also unaware they have depression or they fear their insurance is inadequate to cover costs.
- Most employers will refer a depressed employee for help if they are aware of the symptoms. 64% of NMHA Survey respondents said they would refer an employee to an EAP health professional

Recognize the Symptoms of Depression

- Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" mood.
- Sleeping too little, early morning awakening, or sleeping too much.
- Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed, including sex.
- Restlessness, irritability.
- Persistent physical symptoms that don't respond to treatment (such as headaches, chronic pain or digestive disorders).
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions.
- Fatigue or loss of energy.
- Feeling guilty, hopeless or worthless.
- Thoughts of suicide or death.



Addressing Depression in the Workplace

- Managers need to be equipped with the right skills to create a "nice playground" and manage employees from a behavioral perspective.
- HR can train managers in how to converse with employees at risk for depression so they don't feel threatened or shift into panic mode. For example, instead of accusing employees of underperforming, they could ask: "Is there something I can do to help you? Is there something we can do together to help you address whatever issues and concerns you have?"
- HR can focus on the workplace environment, ensuring that people have a voice in the workplace, camaraderie and a social network, and work alongside people who are respectful and understanding of each individual's skills and capabilities
- Strongly promote employee EAP/Behavioral Health benefits through posters, wallet cards, trainings.
- Recognize that a depressed employee may need a flexible work schedule during treatment. Find out about your company's approach by contacting your human resources specialist.
- Remember that severe depression may be life-threatening to the employee, but rarely to others. If an employee makes comments like "life is not worth living" or "people would be better off without me," take the threats seriously. Immediately call an EAP counselor or other specialist and seek advice on how to handle the situation.

Why Employers Should Care about Depression

Effective treatment has been shown to not only reduce depressive symptoms for workers but also improve workplace outcomes, such as employee retention and productivity. Unfortunately, many employment policies regarding depressive disorders and chronic health conditions, in general, are not informed by clinical understandings of these conditions and the role that employment can play in helping improve recovery.

Studies have shown that workers who return to work soon after depressive episodes have better outcomes than those on long-term disability leave. Employer policies that limit voluntary leave-time may also promote presenteeism by forcing workers with depression to come to work even when this could hamper their treatment plan. Employers may also feel constrained by litigation concerns, and adopt policies that discourage employees from seeking treatment for depressive disorders.



By raising awareness of the illness, encouraging workers to talk openly about it without fear or judgment, and offering effective treatment, HR can better equip employees to battle an illness that's been around for centuries.

Mental Health America. Depression in the Workplace, December 2015, Web

University of Michigan Depression Center, depression toolkit.org, December 2015, Web

Patton, Carol. Out of the Darkness. Human Resource Executive Online March 9, 2015. Web

Questions?

Call Alternatives EAP for consultation on workplace/employee issues @ 1-800-466-8282, or 816-753-8283 x 1