

Promoting Mental Health in the Workplace: A Competitive Advantage

You're probably concerned about your employees' health and wellness. You may have an interest in promoting a healthy work environment and also worry about the expense of providing mental health coverage for your staff.

These are all valid concerns. But there are many reasons why addressing your workforce's mental health makes good business sense. A growing body of research shows that employers' costs due to staff mental health problems are far greater than just the costs on the mental health service bill.

LOWER MEDICAL COSTS

The mind/body connection is undeniable. People who have untreated mental health issues use more general health services than those who seek mental health care when they need it.

That translates to dramatic, and unnecessary, increases in your organization's healthcare bill. A few alarming facts:

- People with high rates of medical service use have four times the prevalence of depression and anxiety disorders. Effective treatment of mental illnesses, especially depression, is associated with improved outcomes for chronic physical disorders.
- Forty-three percent of all adults suffer adverse health effects from stress, and stress is linked to the six leading causes of death: heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver and suicide. In fact, chronic stress may double the risk of heart attack. Both depression and chronic stress can weaken the immune system and make people vulnerable to a host of illnesses.

- Researchers estimate that 50 to 80 percent of all medical illnesses reported to physicians have a strong emotional or stress-related component.

REDUCE ABSENTEEISM, BOOST PRODUCTIVITY AND IMPROVE WORK QUALITY

More than 90 percent of employees agree that their mental health and personal problems spill over into their professional lives, and have a direct impact on their job performance.

Mental health conditions are actually the second leading cause of absenteeism. Some interesting statistics:

- Untreated and mistreated mental illness costs the United States \$150 billion in lost productivity each year. United States businesses foot up to \$44 billion of this bill.
- Workplace stress causes about 1 million employees to miss work each day.
- Three out of four employees who seek care for workplace issues or mental health problems see substantial improvement in work performance after treatment.

According to the RAND Corporation, depression results in more "bed" days than many other medical ailments, including ulcers, diabetes, high blood pressure and arthritis.

Keep in mind that on top of all these factors, your organization may be experiencing more absenteeism, reduced productivity and inferior work quality from staff members who face the emotional stress and time demands of caring for family members who have mental health and related problems.



Log on to these free calculators to find out how depression and alcoholism are affecting your organization's bottom line:

- www.depressioncalculator.org
- www.alcoholcostcalculator.org

TRIM COSTS IN RELATED AREAS

Your organization may also be experiencing increased disability costs because of unaddressed mental health issues. According to the World Health Organization, depression is the second leading cause of disability in the United States. Untreated mental health issues may also cost your organization in the form of increased accidents and greater staff turnover, the costs of which include the resources needed to recruit and train new employees, and to manage employee conflicts. In fact, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration has declared stress a workplace hazard.

GOOD FOR WORKERS, GOOD FOR THE BOTTOM LINE

Current data clearly support the case that employers benefit financially from paying more attention to their staff members' mental health needs. The bad news is that mental health problems are prevalent. They can strike anyone regardless of age, ethnic background, gender or socioeconomic status. Each year, in a typical office of 20 people, four will suffer from a mental health problem. The good news is that there are highly effective, cost-efficient and scientifically validated treatments for mental illness.

Mental health problems actually have better treatment outcome rates than the vast majority of common medical conditions.

Many corporations across the country report that promoting mental health as part of an overall wellness campaign has resulted in reduced health expenses and other financial gains for their organizations. The cost offset to your medical bills for addressing mental health problems is a bargain in the long run. Mental health education efforts more than pay for themselves—in fact, they are a business necessity and offer a competitive advantage. Launching an educational program on mental health just takes a little planning and time. The resources in this kit will get you started on the road to an effective worksite campaign.

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