

Depression in the Workplace

Clinical depression is one of the most costly illnesses in the world today, along with heart disease, cancer and AIDS. It tends to affect people in their prime working years and, if untreated, could last a lifetime.

Prevalence

- Depression ranks among the top three workplace problems, following only family crisis and stress.¹
- At any one time, one out of every 20 employees experiences depression.²

Costs

- Each year, depression costs the U.S. economy \$43.7 billion dollars, including \$31.3 billion for indirect costs, such as decreased productivity and lost work days, and \$12.4 billion in direct costs, such as medication and physician time. ³
- The annual economic cost of depression is \$600 per depressed worker, with only one-third of these costs for treatment while two-thirds are costs related to absenteeism and lost productivity.³
- In a study conducted at First Chicago Corporation, depressive disorders accounted for more than one-half of all mental health problems. The amount for treatment of these claims was close to the amount spent on treatment for heart disease.⁴

Productivity

- An estimated 200 million work days are lost each year due to employee depression.³
- According to a RAND Corporation study, people with depressive symptoms spend more days in bed than those with diabetes, arthritis, back problems, lung problems or gastrointestinal disorders. ⁵

Symptoms of Clinical Depression in the Workplace

Depression often manifests itself in the workplace in the following ways:

- Decreased productivity
- Morale problems
- Lack of cooperation
- Frequent statements about being tired all the time
- Complaints of unexplained aches/pains
- Safety problems/accidents
- Excessive absenteeism
- Alcohol and/or drug abuse

Employee Attitudes Toward Depression

According to a 1996 Employee Assistance Professionals Association survey,¹ respondents most frequently cite the following reasons why employees with depression do not seek treatment:

- They believe they can handle it on their own
- They are unaware they have depression
- They are concerned about employee confidentiality policies

- They believe their insurance coverage will not cover treatment

What an Employer/Supervisor/Colleague Can Do

Depression affects employees at all levels of the corporate ladder. Employers can encourage employees to seek treatment and, consequently, improve productivity, avoid lost work time and reduce employer costs by:

- Providing information about mental health and mental illness to all employees.
- Educating management and employees about depression and recognizing that it is a common medical illness that is treatable in more than 80% of all cases. ⁶
- Training supervisors and colleagues to recognize the symptoms of depression and reminding them that they should *not* diagnose the illness themselves, but rather refer individuals to an Employee Assistance Professional (EAP) counselor or other mental health professional.
- Encouraging employees to be screened for depression by going online to www.depression-screening.org
- Making appropriate treatment available through employee health benefits.
- Reassuring employees that state/federal law and EAP policy dictate employee confidentiality.
- Creating company policy that is supportive of mental health care such as allowing a depressed employee to have a flexible work schedule while in treatment.
- Identifying national and community organizations that can provide help

For More Information:

For a free and confidential mental health screening, go on-line to www.mhacolorado.org.

1 National Mental Health Association and Employee Assistance Professionals Association: "Depression: Its Effects on the Workforce," *Exchange*, 26;5 (1996).

2 National Institute of Mental Health: "What To Do When an Employee is Depressed," Accessed July 6, 1999. Netscape: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/depemployee.cfm>.

3 Greenberg, P.E., Stiglin, L.E., Finkelstein, S.N., Berndt, E.R.: "The Economic Burden of Depression in 1990," *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* 1993; 2:32-35.

4 Conti, D.J., Burton, W.N.: "Economic Impact of Depression in a Workplace," *Journal of Occupational Environmental Medicine* 1994; 36: 987.

5 RAND Corporation: "The Course of Depression in Adult Outpatients: Results from the Medical Outcomes Study," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 1992; 49:788-794.

6 National Institute of Mental Health, "Effects of Depression in the Workplace," Accessed July 6, 1999. Netscape: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/depression/employee/workplace.htm>.