

# Mental Illness in the Workplace

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# Mental Illness Prevalence

Estimated U.S. prevalence:

- 1 in 5 adults – 43.8 million or 18.5% of population – experience mental illness in a given year
- 1 in 25 adults – 9.8 million or 4%—experience serious mental illness in a given year that substantially interferes with or limits one or more major life activities
- Only 40% received professional treatment in the past year
- Among adults with **serious** mental illness, 63% received mental health services in the past year

Source: National Alliance on Mental Illness

*Mental illness can affect anyone – and it impacts everyone*

# U.S. Adults Living with Mental Health Condition

- 16.3% -- Hispanic adults living with a mental condition
- 19.3% -- White adults living with a mental health condition
- 18.6% -- Black adults living with a mental health condition
- 13.9% -- Asian adults living with a mental health condition
- 28.3% -- AI/AN\* adults living with a mental health condition.

# Mental Illness Costs

In the U.S.:

- \$193.2 billion in lost earnings per year due to serious mental illness
- Mental illness and substance abuse cost employers estimated \$79- \$105 billion a year (Center for Prevention and Health)
- 10% claims included at least 1 mental health-related diagnosis and accounted for 60% total costs (Hartford Financial Services Group, 2002-2015 workers' compensation claim data)

Absence, presenteeism, productivity loss, accidents/injuries, EAP, medical care are just some of the cost impacts

# Mental Illness Diagnoses

Among U.S. adult population:

- 18% anxiety disorder (PTSD, OCD, specific phobias)
- 7% at least one major depressive episode
- 2.5% bipolar disorder
- 1% schizophrenia

Among the 20.2 million adults with substance use disorder, about half have a co-occurring mental illness (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration national survey)

# They Don't Come with an ID Bracelet

Mental illness is found in all business sectors –  
from the boardroom to the factory floor,  
from academia to art

# Mental Illness in the Workplace

Symptoms may manifest differently at work than in other settings:

- 18% employed respondents experienced symptoms of mental health disorder in previous month
- Depression, anxiety, attention deficit commonly found
- Researchers ranked the most costly health conditions (including direct and indirect costs): Depression ranked 1st, anxiety 5th. Obesity, arthritis, and back and neck pain fell inbetween

Sources: National Comorbidity Survey and Harvard Mental Health Letter

# Harvard Mental Health Letter (February 2010)

- Symptoms of mental health disorders may be different at work than in other situations.
- Although these disorders may cause absenteeism, the biggest impact is in lost productivity.
- Studies suggest that treatment improves work performance, but is not a quick fix.
- When researchers ranked the most costly health conditions (including direct and indirect costs), depression ranked first, and anxiety ranked fifth — with obesity, arthritis, and back and neck pain in between.



# Harvard Mental Health Letter (Feb 2010)

- The literature on mental health problems in the workplace suggests that the personal toll on employees — and the financial cost to companies — could be eased if a greater proportion of workers who need treatment were able to receive it. The authors of such studies advise employees and employers to think of mental health care as an investment — one that's worth the up-front time and cost.
- The studies have found that when depression is adequately treated, companies reduce job-related accidents, sick days, and employee turnover, as well as improve the number of hours worked and employee productivity.

# U.S. Mental Health Burden

*Financial, individual and societal burdens can be greatly reduced when employees receive professional evaluation and effective treatment*

# Work is Therapeutic

Mental illness doesn't preclude the ability to be productive at work

Employment not just about earning a paycheck

Work gives people a sense of purpose, opportunities to learn and  
chance to be with others

Most importantly, work offers hope, which is vital to recovery

# Benefits of Employment

- Helps give people focus
- Allows for financial self-sufficiency
- “Normalcy” can help through the difficult times
- Work is good for mental health but a negative working environment can lead to physical and mental health problems

# Not Working is Not Good for You

Loss of work:

- Threatens Identity
- Results in depression
- Causes anxiety
- Results in a loss of self worth

# What About Those “Problem” Cases?

- Work-related injuries that fail to resolve as expected labeled as “problem” cases
- 50 -70% of employees with diagnosable psychiatric disorders initially present with somatic (physical) symptoms
- Mental illness often (but not always) comorbid condition

# Comorbid Conditions

People with mental illness have a higher incidence of:

- Substance Abuse Disorder
- Musculoskeletal pain
- Chronic illnesses/disease
- Suicide
- Absenteeism

# Psychosocial Roadblocks

Viewed as **leading barrier** to successful outcomes by claims professionals who say they “drive up claim costs far more than catastrophic injuries, mostly due to delayed recovery.”

*Source: Rising Medical Solutions 2016 Workers' Compensation Benchmarking survey*



# Recommendations

## 1. Connect the Dots

- About 1 in 5 of your employees is working with a psychiatric disability
- As an organization, developing your capacity to respond effectively when a mental illness arises is not just “nice to do” and or exclusively about legal liability

Use mental health interventions as personnel management strategy to fully leverage talent

Refer to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) National Network for resources

# Recommendations

## 2. Facilitate the Accommodations Process

Workers with psychiatric disabilities are less likely to ask for reasonable accommodations under the ADA because of misperceptions and stigma around mental illness

Create a culture in which employees feel comfortable requesting an accommodation – *before* a mental health disorder impacts their job performance, co-workers and your workplace

# Recommendations

## 3. Thoroughly investigate safety-related concerns

- Vague or general fears that a worker with a psychiatric disability is going to be violent in the workplace do not constitute a credible safety concern

Actions you take in response to safety concerns must  
be grounded in evidence

# From ADA National Network (+ previous slide)

- **Managers as first responders.** As face-to-face leaders, managers and supervisors are very likely to be “first responders” to accommodation requests and set the tone for disability inclusiveness in the workplace. Get the message out to all managers and supervisors in your workplace.

# From ADA National Network (+ previous slide)

- **Sources of sharing and support.** Having an effective Employee Assistance Program and/or Disability Employee Resource Group can go a long way toward creating a positive climate to help workers stay effective when working with psychiatric disabilities.

# From ADA National Network (+ previous slide)

- **Harassment and bullying.** Because mental health conditions are so highly stigmatized and misunderstood, workers with psychiatric disabilities are more likely than others to experience workplace harassment. Send the message across the workplace that workers with psychiatric disabilities have the same right to a respectful and effective workplace as any other worker with a disability.

# Promote a Work/Life Balance

- Praising employees for putting in long hours will hurt your company in the long-run. It's important to encourage a healthy work/life balance.
- Insist employees take vacations. Don't expect everyone to answer email around the clock. Instead, make it clear that you value everyone's need to have a rich, full life outside of the office.

# Educate Employees About Mental Health

- Talk about mental health with your employees. Offer free screening tools that can help them identify their risk factors and potential treatment needs.
- Make sure managers are aware of the signs of mental health problems and train them to respond appropriately. A caring conversation between a manager and employee could be instrumental in encouraging an employee to seek help.



# Talk about EAP Benefits Often

- Although many companies offer employee assistance programs, few of them talk about what that means. Remind your employees to use the EAP and remind them of their benefits often.
- Whether an employee is experiencing marital issues or insomnia, EAPs can help employees deal with the issues that detract from their performance. But, they need reassurance that it's free of charge and completely confidential.
- *Previous three slides from Forbes article by Amy Morin, February 2017*

# Recognizing Signs and Symptoms of Mental Health Illness

- Feeling sad or down
- Confused thinking or reduced ability to concentrate
- Excessive fears or worries, or extreme feelings of guilt
- Extreme mood changes of highs and lows
- Withdrawal from friends and activities
- Significant tiredness, low energy or problems sleeping

- Detachment from reality (delusions), paranoia or hallucinations
- Inability to cope with daily problems or stress
- Trouble understanding and relating to situations and to people
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Major changes in eating habits
- Sex drive changes
- Excessive anger, hostility or violence
- Suicidal thinking

- Withdrawal — Recent social withdrawal and loss of interest in others
- Drop in functioning — An unusual drop in functioning, at school, work or social activities, such as quitting sports, failing in school or difficulty performing familiar tasks
- Problems thinking — Problems with concentration, memory or logical thought and speech that are hard to explain
- Increased sensitivity — Heightened sensitivity to sights, sounds, smells or touch; avoidance of over-stimulating situations
- Apathy — Loss of initiative or desire to participate in any activity
- Feeling disconnected — A vague feeling of being disconnected from oneself or one's surroundings; a sense of unreality

- Illogical thinking — Unusual or exaggerated beliefs about personal powers to understand meanings or influence events; illogical or “magical” thinking typical of childhood in an adult
- Nervousness — Fear or suspiciousness of others or a strong nervous feeling
- Unusual behavior – Odd, uncharacteristic, peculiar behavior
- Sleep or appetite changes — Dramatic sleep and appetite changes or decline in personal care
- Mood changes — Rapid or dramatic shifts in feelings

# Make Wellness a Priority

- Exercise, healthy eating, and participation in leisure activities improve mental health. Whether you offer incentives to employees to who participate in wellness programs, or you offer workout space in the office, make wellness a top priority for your organization.

# Provide In-Service Trainings

- Provide employees with in-service trainings on various self-care topics. Hiring a therapist to provide half-day workshops a few times a year on stress reduction or meditation could boost employees' resilience. It may save you money in the long-term while also helping employees reach their greatest potential.

# Support Employees' Efforts to Get Help

- It's essential to support employees' efforts to seek treatment for mental health issues. That may mean allowing time off to attend appointments or it could mean supporting an employee's need to take on fewer projects while he adjusts to new medication. But make it clear to employees that they will not be penalized for taking care of their mental health.



# Reduce the Stigma

- By regularly addressing stress management, self-care, and mental health, you'll help reduce the stigma associated with mental illness. When employees trust you won't call them "crazy" or fire them for their struggles, they may be more willing to seek treatment. And that could be the key to boosting employee health and happiness.

- Any working population is complex and presents multiple challenges for environment, health and safety (EH&S) professionals.
- The need to determine whether an applicant or employee is physically and mentally fit for work is a common confounder. While this responsibility often falls outside their comfort zone, it is possible for EH&S professionals who lack medical training to confidently engage the fitness-for-work assessment process.

# THE most important thing you can do....

- Employee Assistance Programs

# Employee Assistance Programs

- FFW assessment may be used to identify the need for EAP referral for further evaluation, counseling and other interventions
- EAP may be used as a resource for return-to-work monitoring, follow-up drug testing or family counseling
- EAPs have been shown to be effective, but resources are limited