**The Economics of Depression**

A hidden disease comes to work daily. It brings agitation, low motivation and steals the initiative of 10 to 17 million adult employees. In addition to impacting the person’s quality of life, workplace productivity becomes a significant problem for the individual. (Cox, Ness & Carlson 2008) No one is immune to this treatable condition it is found from corporate America to the working class.

This costly workplace sickness is called clinical depression. Depression is one of the top three problems that cause employee assistance professionals to see employees. Left untreated, depression becomes a life-long struggle for the individual; engaging in intervention leads the employee to feel relief and in control of his life. (Depression in the workplace, 2010)

Researchers have identified ways that depression affects productivity. These behaviors affect the quality and quantity of work: absenteeism, tardiness, procrastination, emotional sensitivity, difficulty remembering tasks, or isolating from others. (Learner, et. al, Wallace, Wang, et. al)

**The Cost Factor**

Due to these and other symptoms, depression in the workplace becomes costly to employers across the nation. It is estimated that several billions of dollars is lost in employee productivity. (Economic burden of depression, 2003)

Price of depression

12 billion dollars from lost productivity

12 billion dollars from absenteeism

12 billion dollars from direct treatment costs,

17.5 billion dollars from mortality

Fig. 1 (National Mental Health Association Fact Sheet, 2006)

To further emphasize the price of depression, research from the early 1990’s to 2006, estimates the costs to business and industry.

A loss of productivity can be attributed to absenteeism and presenteeism, a term describing employees present on the job whose output is at a minimum due to illness or depression.

The dollar amounts are warnings to companies to provide preventative measures that help employees cope with stress and seek help. However, it is difficult for someone to admit their vulnerability and need for help in the work place. The employee, although protected under confidentiality laws, fears the information will become common knowledge.

The Role of Supervision

Most employers subscribe to Employment Assistance Programs, (EAP) providing employees counseling at no cost, for a limited amount of sessions. The EAP is responsible to keep the employee’s information confidential and can only share with the employer how many people take advantage of the service, never the names.

Supervisors are encouraged to know the behaviors of depression and provide resources for employees who would benefit. Supervisors also should be informed of the health care plans’ mental health coverage. If an employee shares specific information regarding her mental health, the supervisor must abide by confidentiality laws as well as provide accommodations for the employee such as a flexible work schedule. (What to do, 2010) Timely assistance and intervention will keep both the worker and the workplace from suffering.

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