

FEAP NEWSLETTER

A Series of Educational Articles from your Faculty and Employee Assistance Program

Depression in The Workplace

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Success in the work environment depends on everyone's contribution. That's why no one in the workplace can afford to ignore depression.

This year, more than 19 million American adults (9.5% of the population) will suffer from this often misunderstood disorder. It is not a passing mood. It is not a personal weakness. It is a major-but treatable-illness. No job category or professional level is immune, and even a formerly outstanding employee can be affected.

The good news is that, in more than 80% of cases, treatment is effective. It enables people with depression to return to satisfactory, functioning lives. And nearly everyone gets some degree of relief. Treatment includes medication, short-term talk therapy, or a combination of both.

The Cost of Depression in the Workplace

Untreated depression is costly. A RAND Corporation study found that patients with depressive symptoms spend more days in bed than those with diabetes, arthritis, back problems, lung problems or gastrointestinal disorders. ***Estimates of the total cost of depression to the Nation in 1990 range from \$30-\$44 billion.*** Of the \$44 billion figure, depression accounts for close to \$12 billion in lost work days each year. Additionally, more than \$11 billion in other costs accrue from decreased productivity due to symptoms that sap energy, affect work habits, cause problems with concentration, memory, and decision-making. And costs escalate still further if a worker's untreated depression contributes to alcoholism or drug abuse.

Still more business costs result when an employee or colleague has a family member suffering from depression. The depression of a spouse or child can disrupt working hours, lead to days absent from work, effect concentration and morale, and decrease productivity.



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 ^{vii}.

Learn to recognize the symptoms of clinical depression

No two people experience clinical depression in the same manner. Symptoms will vary in severity and duration among different people. See your doctor if you experience five or more of the following symptoms for more than two weeks and seek immediate help if you have suicidal thoughts:

SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

- Persistent sad, "empty" or anxious mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in ordinary activities
- Decreased energy, fatigue, being "slowed down"
- Sleep disturbances
- Eating disturbances
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- Thoughts of death or suicide; suicide attempts
- Irritability
- Excessive crying
- Chronic aches and pains

If a person has five or more of these symptoms for more than two weeks, or interfere with work or family, get a thorough diagnosis. This includes a complete physical and a review of family history of illness

DEPRESSION IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS. TREAT IT. DEFEAT IT.

Workers at every level in an organization can do something about depression. You can start by learning more about this common and serious illness. If you think you or a loved one may have depression, take action. Call FEAP to set up a free, confidential assessment or contact your health provider.

As a supervisor, you cannot diagnose depression. You can, however, note changes in work performance and listen to

employee concerns. Talk with a FEAP counselor regarding suggestions on how best to approach an employee who you suspect is experiencing work problems that may be related to depression.

If an employee voluntarily shares information regarding health problems, including feeling depressed, recommend they seek professional consultation from a FEAP counselor or other health or mental health professional. If an employee makes statements like "life is not worth living" take the threats seriously, calling a FEAP counselor or other specialist and seek advice on how to handle the situation. Recognize that a depressed employee may need a flexible work schedule during treatment. Find out about your organization's policy by contacting your human resources specialist.

Seek consultation from a FEAP counselor for a free, confidential assessment or contact your health provider. The information you share will remain confidential. You can't overcome depression by willpower, so it is important to seek professional help.

The Faculty and Employee Assistance Program is a free, confidential, 24-hour service provided to all employees and family members.

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