

Costly Concerns

Addressing Hidden Health Care Challenges



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The issue pops up in the workplace in a thousand subtle ways. Maybe someone always needs to leave early to go meet with their high schooler's principal. Maybe it's consistently late arrivals. Or increasing absenteeism. Or worse, presenteeism where your employee is physically at work, but not mentally "there" or productive.

These can be signs that employees may be facing behavioral health issues such as depression, anxiety or substance use. Or that their spouses or children may be.

It's not easy to identify behavioral health problems in the workforce. Many times even the employee's closest family is unaware. Stigma and shame can keep employees from talking with their manager or with HR. It's vital to help employees confront these issues if a business is going to protect its investment in staff, improve productivity and be a high-functioning, profitable enterprise.

Consider the facts:

It is estimated by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) that one in six workers is dealing with behavioral health issues such as depression, anxiety and stress, and that about one in 10 have a substance use disorder of some type, according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH). That means that between 10% to 15% of your staff could currently be in need of behavioral health care.

So what are three things you can do to help?

1. Look at the real costs

Looking at your insurance costs won't give you a true picture of how behavioral health is impacting your bottom line.

To get a clearer picture of the financial downside, use "The Real Cost of Substance Use to Employers." This free online calculator was developed by the National Safety Council and the national nonprofit Shatterproof in collaboration with the independent research institution NORC (formerly the National Opinion Research Center) at the University of Chicago.

This will give you specific information about the cost of substance use (including prescription drug misuse, alcohol misuse, opioid and heroin addiction as well as misuse of other illicit drugs and marijuana) in the workplace based on the size of your employee base, industry and state. Visit shatterproof.org/workplace-cost-calculator to see what substance use is truly costing your company.

2. Find a behavioral health partner

Just as you went to a professional to help develop and implement your wellness plan, the same should be true for behavioral wellness. Most HR departments are not comfortable addressing substance use or

behavioral health issues and are reluctant to bring up the topic. Likewise, employees are hesitant to reach out for help because of stigma and a fear of losing their co-workers' respect – or even their jobs.

A good first step is to talk to your benefits broker or employee assistance program provider. You may also want to work with a substance use treatment facility in your area to provide education to your HR staff and options to your employees. With the opioid crisis in full swing, treatment centers of all types are popping up throughout Indiana. To find a reputable, nationally accredited treatment facility, go to the National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers (NAATP) and use its directory at naatp.org.

3. Create a culture of acceptance

Easier said than done. However, openly talking about behavioral health issues and substance use is a great way to start a dialogue with employees. Supporting a staff member's behavioral health is not just about keeping a valuable asset but also about sending a message across the organization about your values.

For information on how to talk about substance use issues as well as find other valuable resources, visit Next Level Recovery Indiana at in.gov/recovery/know-the-o for facts, training, tools and more.

Often employees are afraid to discuss a behavioral health issue they may be experiencing; therefore, their problems can spiral out of control. These issues may not only affect the performance of the individual employee, but everyone in the organization.

Additionally, when employees return to work after having been treated for a medical issue, employers are often provided clear information on what accommodations need to be made to assist the employee with a successful transition. It is often less clear on how to support someone who is recovering from a behavioral health or substance use disorder.

Managers and supervisors of people often are not trained on how to identify employees at risk or how to have a conversation with someone about their behavioral health. Learning these skills, tackling any causes around work-related behavioral health issues and developing a culture supportive of both physical and mental health well-being will not only boost employee engagement – it may save a life!

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