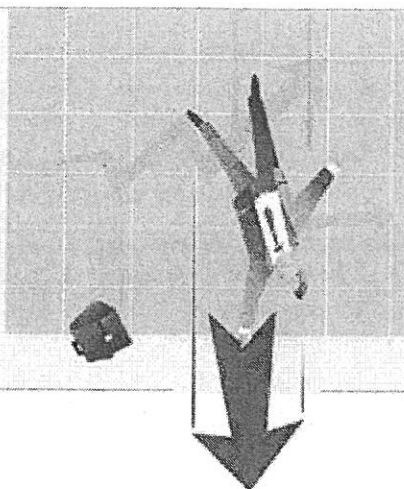


Recognizing Depression in the Workplace



By DONNA TOSCHES

A few years ago, a close friend called to ask for treatment referrals for her brother-in-law. My friend told me that her sister called to share that her husband had been struggling for months with depression and it had gotten to the point where he was having trouble going to work. My friend thought it strange that her sister hadn't mentioned anything before about his struggle even though they speak several times a week. His symptoms included difficulty getting out of bed, trouble sleeping, weight gain, and increased alcohol intake. His wife had to encourage him to shower. He was making excuses to his boss about why he couldn't keep up his intense travel schedule for work. His sales decreased and the company's financial bottom line was taking a hit. Not until his direct supervisor pointed out the behaviors he was seeing and the decreased job performance did my friend's brother-in-law and sister decide it was time to reach out for help. The leader's crucial conversation with their employee made all the difference to this man and his family.

How Depression Affects the Workplace

Most likely, you are aware that there are employees in your organization struggling with depression. Close examination of your health plan formulary will reveal that one of the most often prescribed medications for your employees are antidepressants. Depression is a common illness experienced by nearly one in ten Americans each year. The Partnership for Workplace Mental Health indicates that about 50% of employees affected by major depression are undiagnosed, and usually go untreated.

Depression that goes undiagnosed, untreated and/or mis-treated has a huge financial impact on business. Here are a few sobering statistics that point out how depression affects the workplace.

- Depression is the leading cause of medical disability for people aged 14 to 44 (Stewart, Ricci, Chee, Hahn, & Morganstein, 2003).
- Depressed people lose 5.6 hours of productive work every week when they are depressed (Stewart, 2003).
- Eighty percent of depressed people are impaired in their daily functioning (Pratt & Brody, 2008).
- Fifty percent of the loss of work productivity is due to absenteeism and short-term disability (R. C. Kessler, et al., 1999).
- In any 30 day period, depressed workers have 1.5 to 3.2 more short-term disability days (Druss, Schlesinger, & Allen, 2001).
- People with symptoms of depression are 2.17 times more likely to take sick days (Adler, et al., 2006; Greener & Guest, 2007). And when they are at work their productivity is impaired—less ability to concentrate, lower efficiency, and less ability to organize work.
- Employees are older, and the numbers of employees with chronic conditions such as depression, anxiety, and diabetes, are increasing. In addition self-reported data from more than 1.3 million employees indicate that 30% experienced some depression or were in treatment. (Berry LL, Mirabito AM, Baun WB. Harv Bus Rev 2010)
- According to a recent study by the Rand Corporation, depression results in more days in bed than many other ailments (such as ulcers, diabetes, high blood pressure and arthritis)

Depression is an Illness

Everyone feels sad from time to time. However, if a person experiences these emotions intensely and for long periods of time, it may signal clinical depression, a condition that requires treatment. Depression is a medical illness that affects your mood, behavior, thinking and health. Depression is a common illness. Depression does not discriminate; it affects men and women, young and old, and people of all races, cultures, and incomes. **Depression is a common illness, not a weakness.**

According to the National Institute for Mental Health, clinical depression affects the total person—body, feelings, thoughts and behaviors—and comes in various forms. Some people have a single bout of depression; others suffer recurrent episodes. Still others experience severe mood swings of bipolar disorder with moods alternating between depressive lows and manic highs. Depression is most likely a result of an imbalance in the brain's chemistry. Genetic history may also play a role in depression. Depression may be more likely if one suffers from illnesses like stroke, heart attack, cancer, Parkinson's disease or hormonal disorders. It may also be more likely if one has suffered a serious loss, difficult relationship, financial problems or other stressful situation.

Just like any other illness, depression must be diagnosed by a professional health care provider who can determine appropriate treatment. Studies have shown that depressed people often wait longer than most any other illness to seek treatment. But, there is good news. More than 80 percent of depressed people can be treated quickly and effectively. The key is to recognize the symptoms of depression early and to receive appropriate treatment.

Symptoms of Depression

Symptoms of depression are different from person to person, but usually include the following:

- Depressed mood or a loss of interest for weeks or longer
- Major weight loss or gain in a short time
- Overeating or loss of appetite
- Excessive sleepiness or insomnia
- Feeling agitated, restless, irritable
- Fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day
- Feeling worthless or excessively guilty
- Finding it difficult to concentrate, make decisions and remember
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Chronic aches and pains that don't respond to treatment
- Excessive crying

Depression Affects Employees

Depression can affect workers' productivity, judgment, ability to work with others, and overall job performance. The inability to concentrate fully or make decisions may lead to costly mistakes or accidents. In addition, it has been shown that depressed individuals have high rates of absenteeism and are more likely to abuse alcohol and drugs, resulting in other problems on and off the job.

Unfortunately, many depressed people suffer needlessly because they feel embarrassed, fear being perceived as weak or do not recognize depression as a treatable illness. As was the case with my friend's brother-in-law; there were feelings of shame and guilt that stood in the way of reaching out sooner. **Depression is a common illness, not a weakness.**

In the workplace, symptoms of depression often may be recognized by
• Decreased productivity
• Morale problems
• Lack of cooperation
• Safety risks, accidents
• Absenteeism
• Frequent statements about being tired all the time
• Complaints of unexplained aches and pains
• Alcohol and/or drug abuse
• Difficulty getting along with co workers
• Presenteeism - defined as the measure of lost productivity cost due to employees actually showing up for work, but not being fully engaged and productive.

How Can Leaders Help?

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, leaders can show support for an employee with the following conversations and interactions:

- Know what to say: "I'm concerned that you've been late to work recently and aren't meeting your performance objectives. I'd like to see you get back on track. I don't know whether this is the case for you, but if you have a personal problem you can speak confidentially to one of our employee assistance counselors. The service was set up to help employees who are experiencing personal problems. Our conversation today and your appointment with the counselor are confidential. Whether or not you contact this service, you still will be expected to meet your performance goals."
- Learn about depression and the sources of help. Become familiar with the company's health benefits and resources, such as an employee assistance program (EAP).
- Recognize when an employee shows signs of a problem affecting performance, which may be depression-related, and refer appropriately. Supervisor cannot diagnose depression. A supervisor can, however, note changes in work performance and listen to employee concerns. Always reach out to the company's EAP and consult with a counselor on how best to approach an employee who may be experiencing problems related to depression.

Financial Wellness Program



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- Discuss changes in work performance with the employee. You may suggest that the employee seek consultation if there is a personal problem. Confidentiality of any discussion with the employee is critical. If an employee voluntarily discusses health problems, including feeling depressed or down all the time, keep these points in mind:

- » Do not try to diagnose the problem.
- » Recommend that any employee experiencing symptoms of depression seek professional consultation from an EAP counselor or other health or mental health professional.
- » Recognize that a depressed employee may need a flexible work schedule during treatment.
- » Remember that severe depression may be life-threatening to the employee. If an employee makes comments like "life is not worth living" or "people would be better off without me," take the threats seriously. Immediately call an EAP counselor or other specialist and seek advice on how to handle the situation.

There Are More Ways to Help

Educate employees and managers about mental health, including depression. Employees look to their business leaders to provide guidance about all aspects of their wellness and that needs to include information about depression and other mental health issues. Encourage employees to seek care when they need it by educating the workforce that mental illnesses are real and can be effectively treated. Teach supervisors how to (and how not to) intervene appropriately by focusing on job performance.

Screen for depression. Include depression screening in health risk appraisals and EAP programs. Work with health plans to incentivize clinicians to screen and ensure that appropriate systems are in place to follow up for diagnosis and treatment. Use the validated 9-item Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9), available in multiple languages and formats.

Promote the use of employee assistance and health programs. Early intervention is the key. Remind employees of the availability of resources for staying healthy and productive. Ensure that employees know how to access care confidentially and quickly by providing information on how to do so in multiple places and throughout the year. Heavily push these messages during times of stress, at the holidays, etc.

Integrate mental health educational messages in health communication strategies. Include content about depression in company newsletters, on the intranet and in other regular employee communication platforms.

Use the Depression Calculator. Visit the Partnership for Workplace Mental Health to access the depression calculator to estimate the cost of depression in the every workplace. (<http://www.workplacentalhealth.org/Business-Case/Depression-Calculator.aspx>.) The calculator is based from the **Productivity Impact**

Model (PI Model) which helps estimate the cost of depression to a specific company, and can also project the benefits when depressed employees receive treatment.

National Depression Screening Day®

October 10, 2013 is National Depression Screening Day. Held annually during Mental Illness Awareness Week in October, National Depression Screening Day (NDSD) raises awareness and screens people for depression and related mood and anxiety disorders. Businesses can promote depression screening in partnership with their Employee

October 10, 2013
National Depression
Screening Day

Assistance Program. There are resources that can assist by contacting local mental health services in your community. Many online resources are available such as Screening for Mental Health <http://www.mentalhealthscreening.org/events/national-depression-screening-day.aspx>; Mental Health America http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/llw/depression_screen.cfm or more locally at the Dennis H. Jones Living Well Network at www.livingwellfrontporch.org where adults can take a depression screening test, learn more about depression; discover the many pathways to treat symptoms of depression and call to talk to licensed counselor to find help in their community.

So, what happened to my friend's brother-in-law? A few months after he sought help for his depression, I saw him at a birthday party at my friend's home. He looked good; smiling, engaged in conversation. He walked me out to my car when I left and said "I never really understood what therapy was all about. It was for other people, not people like me. But, now I know it is for me and it has made all the difference."

Depression is a common illness. Discussion about depression, especially at the workplace, and treatment for depression is not just for the other person; it is for every person.

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