

BENEFITS INSIGHTS

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Lindsey Business Group

Depression in the Workplace

Depression is a debilitating disease that not only affects the person suffering from it, but also affects those around them and the employer's bottom line. In addition to the medical costs to treat depression, employers see huge losses in productivity from workers who are depressed and not treated. In fact, among diseases such as arthritis, allergies, asthma, back pain, headaches and high blood pressure, depression is most likely to decrease focus and inhibit productivity, according to the American Psychiatric Association. The direct and indirect costs of depression can be significant for employers, making it essential to address. Employers can combat depression in the workplace by educating their employees and making available valuable resources to help those suffering from the condition.

What is Depression?

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, a depressive disorder is a debilitating disease that affects the body, mind, mood and thoughts of an individual. This illness affects many aspects of the individual's life such as eating and sleeping patterns, self-esteem, motivations and perceptions. Symptoms of depression that may be evident in the workplace include:

- Minimal or inconsistent productivity
- Absenteeism, lateness, leaving one's work station frequently
- Downfall in work quality
- Missing deadlines or putting things off
- Withdrawal from others
- Overly sensitive or emotional
- Lack of an interest in one's work
- Difficulty learning new things or remembering
- Slowed thoughts and actions
- Comments about being tired all the time or an appearance of being lethargic

Never offer a potential diagnosis yourself or ask the individual if they have depression; you would face legal liability under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Instead, it may be appropriate to express your concern for the individual's well-being, or discuss their performance if it is suffering. A safer route would be to promote education and resources to your entire workforce, to encourage those suffering to seek assistance.

Employers can take a proactive approach to battling depression and assist their employees on the road to recovery in various ways. These strategies can help.



LINDSEY SOLUTIONS



Employer Action

Employers can take a proactive approach to battling depression and assist their employees on the road to recovery in various ways. One strategy is launching a depression initiative campaign, which may include education on the disease, health screenings that include mental health and assistance programs supported by the company's insurance carrier. Many community organizations, non-profit groups and insurance carriers currently offer resources that can assist you in developing a program that suits your company's needs. These programs can offer the following benefits:

- Remove the stigma associated with depression and mental illness
- Offer employees easier access to physicians specializing in mental illness
- Educate employees on the benefits and treatments available to them
- Help employees identify the symptoms of depression in themselves or others in their lives
- Instruct employees on how to successfully treat the disease while also being a productive member of the staff
- Encourage undiagnosed or untreated employees suffering from the disease to take action to improve their own quality of life
- Provide free health screening that can identify depression among other health problems

In choosing your health plan, seek out providers that offer depression treatment as part of their overall plan. That way, many resources will already be available to your employees through the plan and it can also provide a starting point for your company-wide depression initiative.

