



Introducing Mental Health First Aid

By Michelle Atlas

Mental Health in the Workplace

Untreated depression costs employers billions of dollars each year. People experiencing symptoms of depression spend more days in bed than those with ulcers, high blood pressure, diabetes, arthritis, back problems, lung problems or gastrointestinal disorders. According to a study published by the National Institute of Mental Health close to \$12 billion is lost as a result of absenteeism due to depression each year. More than \$11 billion in additional costs accrue from decreased productivity related to symptoms that diminish energy, impact concentration, memory and decision-making, and effect work behavior. **An employer's bottom-line is grossly impacted** by lost working hours when employees are absent from work as well as when they are at work performing at significantly less than optimal mental capacity. **Employers can become better educated regarding how to identify the early symptoms of depression and other mental-health disorders, and the available treatment options. This, coupled with a commitment to creating a work environment that supports employees in seeking early treatment presents a \$24 billion opportunity to recover lost costs.**

What Employers Need to Know

- The global burden of disease is shifting from infectious to **non-communicable disorders and disability.**
- According to the World Health Organization in 1990 mental health issues were the fourth greatest cause of lost productive workdays, and by the year 2020 they predict that **mental health disorders will be the second greatest cause of lost productive workdays.**
- 1 in 10 individuals will develop depression.

- As things stand now two out of three of those people will go undiagnosed and untreated. There is an 80% success rate when depression is treated.
- When proper treatment is applied an individual will recover their productivity and an employer will recover \$3-\$4 for every \$1 invested as the employee recovers their full potential.
- Early intervention can prevent a mental health issue from developing to a level that may lead to disability
- **There are great rewards for the employer who promotes early recognition and supports treatment.**

What Is Mental Health First Aid?

It is the initial response to a mental health crisis, or to the mild, moderate, or severe symptoms of many common mental health disorders. As "First Aid", it is not treatment, but treatment and self-help strategies can be recommended as a part of providing mental health first aid.

The Mental Health First Aid Course

The Mental Health First Aid Course is offered in a 12 or a 9 hour version. It can be customized to focus on specific areas of concern and to meet various scheduling constraints. The potential benefits are enormous:

- Learn to recognize signs and symptoms of mental-health issues in the early phases so that treatment or self-help strategies can be supported before disability occurs.
- Learn about highly effective treatment options.
- Learn to re-frame perspective on common mental-health issues, to promote acceptance and remove barriers, by understanding them within the context of familiar physical ailments.
- Learn how individuals at every level in the workplace can provide critical support in the process of early recognition/intervention.
- Position your company to be a pioneer of in the area of mental-health literacy, and begin to recoup dollars lost due to the incidence of depression in your workplace.

Who Should Take The Mental Health First Aid Course?

Individuals at all levels in any workplace. The value derived from The Mental Health First Aid Course for a company as a whole, is multiplied, when individuals ranging from leadership to department heads to supervisors, and front-line staff all participate.

History And Contact Information

Betty Kitchener, RN and Professor Tony Jorm, PhD, Director of the Mental-health Institute at the Australian National University in Canberra Australia developed the Mental-health First Aid Course. The course is offered throughout Australia, and more recently in Scotland, China, and the USA.

For more information regarding The Mental Health First Aid Course or to schedule a free one-hour presentation on Mental Health in the Workplace and the Mental Health First Aid Course, please contact Deborah Selke, MPA, CWDP or Michelle Atlas, CWDP at mhfausa@frontiernet.net