

## Improving Mental Health Treatment through Employee Assistance Programs

Many health care consumers are treated for depression and anxiety by primary care physicians. As the first link in the health care treatment system, primary care physicians play an important role in the identification and treatment of these mental health concerns. The primary care physician will often suggest a prescription medication as the primary treatment modality. While the prescription may provide some relief, research has shown that a prescription is only part of the answer.

*In a recent Wall Street Journal article, citing an article in the New England Journal of Medicine, researchers wrote: "There is little evidence to suggest that antidepressants produce specific pharmacological benefit for the majority of patients with less severe acute depression."*

Another Wall Street Journal article states, "More Americans are being prescribed multiple psychiatric medications for use at the same time, but most people diagnosed with recent depression don't get adequate treatment, according to two independent studies."

Depression is a major cause of disability, absenteeism, presenteeism, and productivity loss among working-age adults. **The National Center for Health Statistics estimates that 5% of Americans suffer from depression and 80% of those states that depression interferes with their daily activities including work performance.** Depression costs an estimated \$83 billion dollars annually with approximately two thirds of those costs coming from lowered productivity and workplace absenteeism.

**The National Center for Health Statistics also cites that less than one third of those with mild to moderate depression seek help. Many don't seek help because they are not aware they have a treatable illness and they have concerns about the stigma associated with seeking help.**

**An Employee Assistance Program can help fill the gaps by providing workplace education and awareness along with screening, counseling and follow-up.** The assessment, referral and short term counseling model in most EAP's provides an additional option for patients beyond a prescription. The short-term counseling provided by EAP's can help employees manage the life issues that may be causing, contributing to or exacerbating the depression and anxiety.



The EAP can provide the following expertise in assisting individuals with depression, anxiety and other mental health concerns:

- Skilled assessment of mental health concerns
- Short-term solution-focused counseling
- Evaluation and screening for more serious mental health issues
- Short term monitoring of medication and counseling effectiveness
- Evaluation and referral to more intensive treatment options, if necessary
- Follow-up to and monitoring effectiveness
- Workplace based education and awareness regarding mental health concerns

With Mental Health Parity, it is more important than ever to find the most appropriate level of treatment the first time for the most effective and efficient management of mental health and substance abuse issues.

Studies have found that depression is the most expensive medical condition when health related productivity costs are combined with prescription and medical costs.

**The EAP is a valuable tool in assessment, counseling, education, referral and follow-up to reduce the cost and impact of depression and other mental health concerns in the workplace.**

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