

# Prescription Drug Abuse

The effects of prescription drug abuse continues to take a visible toll in homes and workplaces. Prescription opiates are easily available and the Center for Disease Control states, "Painkillers left over from a tooth extraction or a hip replacement are free for the taking, and no one's looking or counting." Also according to the CDC, overdoses of prescription painkillers have increased three fold, over 12 million people report non-medical use of prescription pain killers and emergency room visits for related problems including withdrawal symptoms have increased since 2009.

Addiction to prescription drugs results in tolerance (needing more drug for the desired response) and withdrawal symptoms. It's easy to see how addiction to prescription drugs impact health care costs and productivity. Employees addicted to prescription drugs will make more trips to the emergency room and doctors offices to attempt to obtain the drugs. Their focus becomes consumed with obtaining the drug and work performance suffers. In the workplace managers may see:

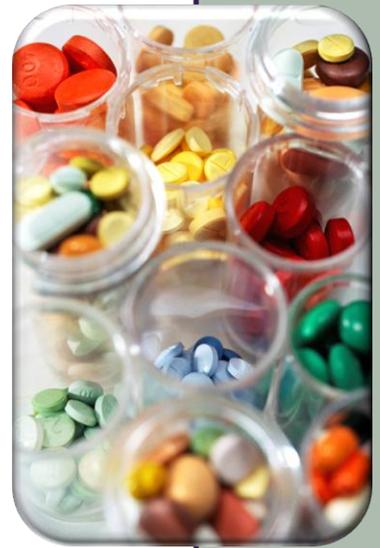
- Declining productivity
- Excessive absenteeism
- Presenteeism
- Diminished quality of work
- Increased accidents and workplace injuries
- Lower morale- as other employees pick up the slack
- Increased in disability claims
- Increased conflict in the workplace with potential for workplace violence

The role of managers is to manage not diagnose. The exercise of basic management skills can make a big impact in decreasing health care costs and improving productivity. It's up to front line managers to:

- Observe the declining performance,
- Document the performance problems
- Have the difficult conversation with the employee regarding performance expectations
- Stick to the facts associated with job performance (don't diagnose)
- State the performance requirements and how performance will be evaluated
- Set a date for follow-up
- Continue observation and follow-up
- Consult with EAP and make a formal management referral

Management plays a key role in morale, health care costs and productivity. Rolling up their sleeves and managing employees and exercising the leadership to address problems as they occur is part of a health workplace culture, saves money and enhances well being. Addiction tests management and leadership. Addicted employees are absent about 50% more than others and have wonderful excuses for each absence.

Consult with your EAP about job performance problems before they escalate. The research shows that excessive absenteeism is the most noticeable performance indicator with this population.



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