Maximizing Your Existing EAP to Tackle Depression in the Workplace:

A Case Study From OCLC
Depression’s Staggering Costs

The economic impact of depression in the workplace is stunning – and it’s growing every year.\(^1,2\)

- It is estimated that depression costs American employers up to $100 billion annually, including $44 billion in lost productivity alone.
- Depression ranks among the top five disability claims globally (among cancer and cardiovascular conditions), and short-term disability claims for mental illness are growing by 10 percent annually.
- Two to four times more healthcare resources are used by employees with depression who aren’t receiving treatment.

Symptoms of depression include loss of interest in activities, feeling down and hopeless, difficulty concentrating and loss of energy. These symptoms can make it very difficult for adults to perform their jobs.

Depression impacts workplace performance in a number of ways, including presenteeism (when an employee is at work, but not engaged or productive), as well as absenteeism (days away from work), sleep disturbance and low energy. No matter their field of work, if employees have depression, it can affect their ability to think clearly and make decisions, and can quickly create major problems for them on the job.

“In today’s business environment, where many employees are being asked to do more often with fewer personnel and resources, the human and economic costs of depression are felt throughout the American workplace” said Debra Lerner, MS, PhD Director, Program on Health, Work and Productivity Institute for Clinical Research and Health Policy Studies at Tufts Medical Center. “Depression takes a toll on workers in all occupations and sectors of the economy including so-called knowledge workers, individuals who perform mainly physically-demanding work and workers in the service sector whose work can be demanding both physically and emotionally.”

Employees Hesitate to Seek Help

There have been important advances in the diagnosis and treatment of depression, and the good news is that with proper care, symptoms can be alleviated and functioning at work can be improved; however, only one-third of people with diagnosable mental health conditions seek care.

While most employers offer an employee assistance program (EAP), it isn’t always enough. On average, only three percent of employees use counseling services available through their company’s EAP. Many employees don’t seek help because of stigma, fear of repercussions, and concerns about confidentiality or lack of awareness about EAP and other health resources. Additionally, some employees may not even realize they have depression because they don’t know the signs and symptoms.

Increasing awareness about depression and helping to reduce the stigma associated with the condition are critical steps employers can take to help people get healthy. It is important for employers to raise awareness within the entire organization, so those living with depression feel comfortable reaching out for support.

How OCLC Took on Depression

OCLC is a nonprofit, membership, computer library service and research organization employing approximately 950 employees in the U.S. and 1,300 globally. OCLC connects libraries using a global network to collectively innovate and drive efficiencies in metadata creation, interlibrary loan, digitization, discovery and delivery.

Beginning in 2010, OCLC took a thorough look at its top claim drivers to determine where to focus its wellness program. As with most U.S. employers, OCLC found the following:

- One of the top three medications used by its medical plan were antidepressants
- Depression was the fourth-highest diagnosed condition for employees on OCLC’s medical plan
- Over the past three years, there was a rise in disability claims related to mental health

OCLC realized that even though EAP utilization by its employees was strong overall, there was a need for focused education on depression and mental health for employees and their dependents.

Moving in the Right Direction

In 2013, OCLC began implementing an awareness initiative called Right Direction to take on the specific issues of depression and mental health in the workplace. Right Direction provides companies the tools to raise awareness, promote early recognition of symptoms, reduce stigma and above all, motivate people to seek care.

OCLC rolled out the initiative during Mental Health Awareness Week in October 2013, which coincided with on-site wellness screenings, as well as the company’s Open Enrollment period. OCLC also hung posters throughout its office locations, incorporated Right Direction into Management Orientation training, hosted a Right Direction awareness booth at its employee benefits fair and included information about mental health in its communications campaign for several health-related awareness months.

Through these efforts, the company was able to personally talk to employees, as well as their spouses, to provide additional details about the initiative and the benefits involved. Following the roll-out of Right Direction, the team received emails from employees expressing happiness that OCLC was starting to address the issue; some even volunteered to help with future programming efforts around the initiative. There wasn’t a single negative comment or question received.

“The more people can learn about depression and understand what it looks and feels like, the better off employers and our employees will be,” said Susan Marsico, Director, Corporate Benefits and HR Systems at OCLC. “The Right Direction initiative works hand-in-hand with our EAP, making it easy to implement, which allows us to enhance our existing resources and encourages more employees to use them. The value of such an initiative was supported and understood by management.”
Real Support for Employers and Employees

*Right Direction* is a first-of-its-kind initiative that works hand-in-hand with a company’s existing EAP to help employees feel comfortable using the mental health resources available and to educate them about the confidentiality policies in place. The initiative can be accessed by visiting www.rightdirectionforme.com.

“While employers play a vital role in leading the conversation of mental health with employees, unfortunately, many employers simply do not have the tools to address this sensitive subject,” says Marcas Miles, senior director of marketing and communications with Employers Health. “The Right Direction initiative provides employers with the resources that raise awareness and reduce stigma around depression in order to provide a more productive workplace and supportive company culture.”

The initiative provides an implementation toolkit that includes presentations to educate senior leaders on the business need and value of focusing on depression and mental health; educational materials to increase employee awareness; information that helps to open up conversations around mental health; and engaging promotional materials that highlight the resources available through *Right Direction*.

Or those who want to learn more, the *Right Direction* website includes information about the signs and symptoms of depression; a downloadable screening tool; and resources and tips for getting help.

The initiative helps employees get healthy and employers get the most out of their workforce through improved performance, productivity and job satisfaction…and decreased disability and turnover of valuable employees.

**Want *Right Direction* at Your Company?**

If you’re an employer and want to learn more, visit www.RightDirectionForMe.com/ForEmployers.html to download an implementation toolkit.

If you’re an employee, visit www.RightDirectionForMe.com to send an anonymous request to your company to implement the *Right Direction* initiative.

*Right Direction* is an effort from the Partnership for Workplace Mental Health, a program of the American Psychiatric Foundation and Employers Health Coalition, Inc., and is supported by Takeda Pharmaceuticals U.S.A., Inc. (TPUSA) and Lundbeck U.S.