

Mental health in the workplace

Supporting mental health and promoting workplace initiatives is a win for all!

The economic burden of mental health problems, and depression in particular, is staggering. In Canada, workplace mental health problems are estimated to be \$14.4 billion annually and have been described as being among the costliest conditions in the country (Stephens & Joubert, 2001).

Depression is one of the most common mental disorders in the workforce (Dewa et al, 2004; Myette, 2008). It impacts an employee's health, functioning, life satisfaction, and overall self esteem. Its impact can include decreased energy, fatigue, poor sleep, diminished/loss of appetite, feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, and apathy (Bruce, 2000; Kennedy, 2008).

Cognitive deficits associated with depression can include impairments in concentration, memory, attention, and decision making. These problems can interfere with the ability to meet the cognitive, emotional and behavioral demands of a job (Gualtieri et al, 2006; Hammar & Ardal, 2009).

Depressive symptoms can be pervasive and therefore workplace initiatives to address mental health are critical for employee health and work performance and employer bottom line. Several initiatives are indeed in

place with concrete steps taken to begin to address this epidemic.

The *Canadian Mental Health Association* (CMHA) addresses workplace mental health issues through their Mental Health Works program-a national program that builds capacity within Canadian workplaces to address the many issues related to mental health in the workplace.

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) recently released (January 2013) a new national standard for workplace mental health and safety for Canadian companies to help them tackle the issue by creating workplaces that promote mental health, reduce stress and support employees dealing with mental illness. It is entitled *Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace-Prevention, Promotion, and Guidance to Staged Implementation*.

Although there has been progress in addressing workplace mental health, we must not overlook the return-to-work needs of employees who have been off work on a mental health disability. They need *targeted return-to-work preparation* in order to maximize return-to-work success.

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Work Information Newsletter is developed by Adeena Wisenthal, registered occupational therapist and owner of ERGO-Wise, a centre in Ottawa that specializes in workplace mental health.

This issue focuses on workplace mental health with an emphasis on the importance of providing targeted return-to-work preparation for people off work for mental health disability; most notably, depression.

Workplace mental health impacts occupational performance!

Effective workplace mental health initiatives reduce stigma and facilitate healthy work functioning.

Education is essential to better understand mental health and to promote an accepting culture at work.

Cognitive work hardening, a targeted return-to-work intervention, prepares employees to return to work following a mental health disability leave.

Investing in workplace mental health makes good ethical and business sense

Workplace mental health

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Employees on a mental health leave may receive treatment in the form of psychotropic medications, psychotherapy, and psychological support. While these treatments can be effective in helping a person with depression improve through symptom control and emotional well-being, they are not targeted at preparing the person to return to work.



At ERGO-Wise, we address this treatment gap through our *cognitive work hardening* program which addresses a broad range of functional issues that people with depression face in the workplace which are critical for resuming job duties and achieving return-to-work success. These include the cognitive skills required to assume job duties and meet work demands, the coping skills required to manage work-related stress and deal with interpersonal issues, and the overall stamina and functional ability to adhere to a work schedule.

Our hallmark *cognitive work hardening* program is offered in a non-clinical

simulated office work setting. A structured work schedule facilitates increased tolerance to work hours and improved stamina. Work simulations help to develop the cognitive skills required to resume job duties (e.g., concentration, memory, multitasking). Inherent in the program are resources that help to develop behavioural/interpersonal skills.

Cognitive work hardening programs are customized to address each client's particular return-to-work needs and occupational performance issues. Clients gain mastery over their cognitive skills while improving work stamina and improving self-confidence. These gains facilitate an easier transition back to the workplace. Typically, returning employees require a shorter ramp up as they have already engaged in their preparation before stepping back into the workplace.

Returning employees who are better prepared are more successful. Employers regain a productive employee and insurance carriers can close their disability file.



References

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Resources:

www.mentalhealthworks.ca

www.shopcsa.ca

ERGO-Wise specializes in workplace mental health. Through our hallmark **cognitive work hardening program**, we focus on return-to-work preparation which assists clients to develop the cognitive skills they need to meet job demands. It also provides the structure and work routine needed to prepare for transitioning back to work. Specific skills such as assertiveness, time management, and organizational skills can be part of the program as well.

Clients who are not ready for return-to-work preparation benefit from **re-activation** through working with the occupational therapist. Setting goals to increase activity and functioning pave the way for life re-engagement which can lead to readiness for return-to-work preparation.

Services are provided within a non-clinical simulated work setting.

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