

sessions were scheduled at the client's convenience, including lunch time, evenings and weekends.

There was high client satisfaction with the program, especially because of its convenience and not having to take time off work to go to a counsellor's office. Clinician and client ratings showed a lot of improvement in depression scores, overall function and work productivity.

These results suggest that telephone counselling may become an important service offered by EAPs to clients with depression. Further studies are underway to more closely look at the clinical and economic impact of telephone counselling.

footnotes

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EAP services needed for all workers

EAPs are a front-line resource for employees with mental health concerns. EAPs can also be considered "primary care settings" for identifying and treating people with mental health conditions. There is great potential for EAPs to develop, apply and evaluate early intervention strategies. Early intervention improves personal and work outcomes for clients with clinical depression and anxiety.

The mental health services provided by EAPs should be available to all workers. ■

Guarding Minds @ Work

A new guide to psychological safety and health

Joti Samra, PhD, RPsych and Merv Gilbert, PHD, RPsych

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Workplace risks that can lead to physical illness and injury in employees have been accepted as an employer responsibility. Protection against these risks is built into health and safety laws and policies. However, the same has not been true for psychosocial risk factors. Psychosocial risk factors are those aspects of work that impact an employee's mental health and safety. Psychological disorders are not easy to see in the way that, for example, a broken arm is which is why they are often referred to as "invisible." But the impact of psychological disorders is anything but invisible.

Psychological disorders are associated with workplace conflict, turnover, accidents and injuries. They are also associated with a reduced ability to tap into the knowl-

edge and leadership provided by experienced employees. Workplace factors don't cause psychological disorders; but they can trigger and worsen a mental health condition.

Workplace factors can also create supportive environments that can help employees heal. These environments are known as 'psychologically safe' workplaces. This is a fairly new term in the area of occupational health and employment law. A psychologically safe workplace promotes quick identification and treatment of mental illness. It also lessens the impact of the illness on the person's life. Psychologically safe workplaces don't harm employee mental health in careless or intentional ways.

There is a growing need to identify and address mental health risks in the workplace. There have been

recent changes in law and policy at the provincial and federal levels. There have also been court rulings that hold employers accountable for the psychological health of staff, most recently in Quebec¹ and Saskatchewan.² These changes have placed increasing responsibility on businesses to deal with psychosocial risk factors.

While Canadian employers are aware of the prevalence and impact of mental illness, many are not sure about how to act. How do employers figure out what psychosocial risks exist in their workplaces? How do they know what programs, policies or services will best address those risks? How do they know whether a new or existing intervention works?

These challenges exist for all organizations, be they large or small,



unionized or non-unionized, urban or rural. However, larger organizations, particularly in bigger cities, are more likely to have practices, staff and resources to deal with mental health issues. The same cannot be said for smaller employers in more remote areas.

A new resource is on the way

In order to help organizations answer these questions, a new resource is being developed by a team at the Consortium for Organizational Mental Healthcare (COMH). COMH is an independent, not-for-profit, academic research centre located within the Faculty of Health Sciences at Simon Fraser University. *Guarding Minds @ Work: A workplace guide to psychological safety*

and health is a new Canadian resource intended to help employers identify and deal with psychosocial risks in their workplaces. It was commissioned by The Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace and funded by The Great-West Life Assurance Company. The project team includes Drs. Joti Samra, Merv Gilbert, Martin Shain and Dan Bilsker.

Guarding Minds @ Work is intended to provide employers with evidence-based tools, that is, tools with good research evidence. These tools include:

- strategies to identify and assess psychological risk factors within their workplace

- criteria for selecting the best programs, policies or services to address these risks
- a framework to evaluate if their efforts are effective

Guarding Minds @ Work is grounded in science and law from Canadian and international sources. A guiding principle will be to make sure that the program is accessible, relevant, practical and clear. It will be able to be used by employers across the country, including small and medium-sized companies or work units. This unique guide was launched at the end of April 2009. It's now available for any employer to download for free or order at www.guardingmindsatwork.ca. ■

footnotes

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Drug Testing in the Canadian Workplace

In Canada and most other countries, it is illegal to drive a car while impaired by alcohol. Most experts agree that the use of the breathalyzer by the police to detect alcohol-impaired drivers has helped reduce alcohol-related crashes. Given the success of the breathalyzer, some companies have used breathalyzers to identify workers impaired by alcohol. Drug testing programs have also been implemented to identify workers who use other drugs, such as marijuana or cocaine.¹

How common are drug testing programs in Canada?

According to a recent survey, about 10% of Canadian worksites and 18% of BC worksites with 100 or more employees have drug testing programs.¹ These programs are much more common in the United States, where legislation in the 1980s made drug testing more widespread in all types of companies. In Canada, drug testing is primarily conducted in situations where safety is a concern.

What are they and why are they used?

The most common reason that companies adopt drug testing in Canada is to reduce industrial accidents related to drug use. Some employers have argued that

simply using drugs, whether on or off the job, increases the likelihood that employees will have a job accident.

The most common form of drug testing in Canada is urinalysis. This test analyzes urine from employees for recent use of drugs such as cannabis, cocaine, opiates and amphetamines. Saliva, hair and blood can also be analyzed for drugs.

There are several situations where employees may be asked to comply with a drug test. Testing is sometimes requested from job applicants. Employees may be tested either on a random basis or after a job accident. If employees test positive for drugs, there are often negative consequences, which can include being fired.

Are drug testing programs effective?

Urinalysis tests have limitations. The biggest limitation is that they cannot identify whether a person is under the influence of drugs at the time of the test.

Breathalyzer tests for alcohol measure impairment at the time of the test, but most drug tests can only be used to determine whether a person used drugs some time in the past. For example, marijuana use up to three weeks prior to the test can be detected, and cocaine use three to five days prior to the test can be detected. If someone used drugs the night before, it doesn't mean



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