

VOLUME 18 | ISSUE 2 | SUMMER 2022

RECENT EVENTS: 42nd Annual Conference – Moving Forward in 2022

The Importance of Managing Mental Health in the Workplace (May 11, 2022)

Concerning employee health and wellbeing, the past couple of years has been a marathon, not a sprint, said Bert Alicea, MA, CEAP, Executive Vice President, EAP+Work/Life Services, Health Advocate. The COVID-19 pandemic, polarized political environment, racial injustice, and severe weather, has created a perpetual state of disruption and uncertainty. This upheaval has strained our mental health.

The pandemic has forced us to make decisions we never imagined and created frustration, boredom, confusion, anger, distress, and strained relationships. One of two marriages ends in divorce, many because of alcohol abuse. People in bad relationships often consider going to work a break, but employees who worked from home lost that during the pandemic. For many, relationship problems increased stress, anxiety, and depression.

Depression ranks among the top three reasons employees use Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs). Its incidence is equal among men and women, but men are more likely to self-medicate. Clinical depression can be treated effectively with medication and talk therapy, but most clinically depressed people won't seek help. Many employees remain silent about depression and other mental health issues because of the stigma and fear of losing their job or a promotion. Also, they don't want to be perceived as being inferior, a moral failure or as having a character flaw.

When a person is depressed, you should be supportive, listen in a way that shows you care and avoids minimizing the pain. Inform the person's supervisor and take mentions of suicide seriously. Suicide occurs every 20 minutes in the U.S. and every 12 seconds worldwide. Its impact on family and friends is devastating. Alicea advised to rephrase the question by not asking depressed people if they will hurt or harm themselves. Because they are already hurting, ending their lives seems like the only way they can stop their pain.

Employers can assist employees in getting help by investing in mental health benefits and teaching staff members on all levels to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental illness. To create a stigma-free workplace, employers can stress that mental illnesses are real, common, and treatable. They can discourage stigmatizing language, including hurtful labels like "crazy, loony or nuts." They must encourage employees and their dependents to consult with the company's EAP should they not feel well mentally.

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Finally, a healthy workplace reassures employees that they are not alone, and their employer and co-workers can and will help.

BERT ALICEA, MA, CEAP – Licensed Psychologist & Executive Vice President, Health Advocate



Bert Alicea is a Licensed Psychologist with more than 30 years of experience in the EAP field. He specializes in assisting with difficult workplace situations and is a premier trainer in Employee Assistance. He conducts trainings locally and nationally on harassment awareness; violence prevention; drug free workplace; DOT compliance training; and supervisor EAP awareness training. He also specializes in executive coaching; conflict mediation; and management and supervisor consultations in assisting with difficult workplace situations. He obtained a Masters of Arts in Industrial Psychology from West Chester University and he also has his Bachelors of Science in Psychology from St. Joseph's University. He is a Licensed Psychologist, a Certified Employee Assistance Professional (CEAP), and a US DOT qualified Substance Abuse Professional. He is also a national member of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association. He actively participates in the Philadelphia Chapter of EAPA and in 2007 he was awarded the "EAP of the Year Award."

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