

Old News, New Again

'HR Reporter' story says depression and anxiety top the list of reasons people see their doctor

**Statement by Bill Wilkerson,
Executive Chairman, Mental Health International**

The HR reporter has published an account of a survey by Morneau Shepell saying that "depression is in line with high blood pressure as the top reason behind visits to family doctors." The survey found that:

- 63% of physicians report that mental health issues such as depression, anxiety disorders and stress represent the fastest increase in their recent patient cases."
- 82% of those employees struggling with mental health problems said it affects their daily work while only 53% of employees suffering so-called physical health problems said this.
- Half of employers believe they have employee with mental health problems and it's clear managers observe reduced productivity, increased absence, and anxious behavior that lead them to this belief.

These numbers are not a surprise. In fact, a similar survey done more than 12 years ago found that depression was, then, the number one reason patients saw their family doctors.

Further, clinical data nearly 20 years old links depression with heart disease, including risk factors such as high blood pressure. When people consult their physician on one, the doctor should ask about the other.

It is already well-established that mental health conditions outweigh physical health problems as a source of lost work time and, in fact, depression and ischemic heart disease – in a 1996 study – were projected to become the leading causes of work years lost worldwide by 2020 through disability and premature death.

There is plenty of evidence that people struggle with depression and anxiety and their family doctor is where they turn most often. My message to researchers is to focus on solutions for problems we already are well-acquainted with.

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