

Inclusiveness

Accommodating Employees with Psychiatric Disabilities

Source: Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation
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Mental Illness and Psychiatric Disability

- ❖ Mental illness is a term that describes a variety of psychiatric and emotional problems that vary in intensity and duration.
- ❖ Mental illnesses become a “disability” when they interfere significantly with a person’s ability to work, learn, think, care for oneself and interact with others.
- ❖ Mental illnesses are not mental retardation or brain injuries. In fact, many people with mental illnesses have strong intellectual capacity.

Examples

- Anxiety Disorders
- Depressive Disorders: Major Depression, Bi-Polar Disease, Seasonal Affective Disorder
- Schizophrenia Disorders: Highly complex and few generalizations hold true for all people diagnosed with one of the disorders. Typically characterized by thoughts that seem fragmented and difficulty processing information. Symptoms are either negative (social isolation and withdrawal) or positive (hallucinations, delusions and thought disorders).

Impact

- Mental illnesses are treatable.
- Economic costs are significant—indirect costs of mental illnesses due to lost productivity and early morbidity—exceed \$72 Billion
- National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH) estimates 20% of population will experience mental illness in their lives.

Characteristics

- Irregular nature of the illness
- Stress associated with non-disclosure
- Side effects of medications
- Interrupted education, training and career path
- Co-morbidity issues
- Interpersonal difficulties

Accommodations that Work

- Adjustment of work schedules
- Flexible Leave
- Specialized equipment or assistive devices
- Providing special transportation
- Providing human assistance
- Changes in supervision or supervisory style
- Modifying work sites

Reality

- Organizational barriers
- Staff attitudes towards accommodations
- Preferential treatment vs. equal treatment
- Supervision vs. support

Facts

- Mental Illness is not a moral weakness.
- People cannot “snap out of it”
- People can work and learn successfully with a mental illness with supportive treatment and opportunities
- A person’s diagnosis has no correlation nor can it predict his or her ability to work.

Recovery

- Recovery is the emergent perspective guiding service programs, treatment approaches and our social response to people with mental illnesses .(New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003)
- Recovery does not mean a “cure”, rather it means developing meaning and purpose in life, despite the reality of living with a disability (Anthony, 1993).
- World wide research documents that people do recover from the consequences of a mental illness and live meaningful, purposeful lives in their communities of choice (Harding, 1994; 2003)

Importance of Work in Recovery

- Last ten years of research demonstrates that work is one of the most effective ways to assist people with mental illnesses to recover (Drake & Bond, 2008)
- Work has demonstrated robust success across age, gender, culture, diagnosis and socioeconomic status as critical to assisting people to fully integrate as rightful citizens in their communities. (Drake & Bond, 2008)

Benefits of Employment

- Decreased poverty
- Increased self-esteem
- Increased quality of life
- Decreased isolation
- Decreased cognitive impairments
- Improved societal attitudes about mental illness—reduction in stigma
- Decreased misunderstandings and fears
- Addition of underutilized and underdeveloped workforce

Americans with Disabilities Act

ADA

- Civil rights legislation to prohibit employment discrimination against a qualified individual because of his or her disability.
- Requires Employers to make reasonable accommodations to the known limitations of the disability of the “otherwise qualified individual.”
- Accommodations for people with psychiatric disabilities often revolve around schedules, supervision and emotional support.
- These accommodations are inexpensive—The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) states that most cost less than \$500 and companies report a return of benefits of (\$30) for every dollar invested in making an accommodation. [Job Accommodation Network](#)

Some Organizational Barriers

- Challenges in changing the things that define organizational culture
- “New Territory”—some organizations have no experience integrating self-disclosed person in recovery in the workforce.
- Parallel vs. integrated workforce
- Executive leadership minimally involved or disengages from efforts too soon
- May not take advantage of outside expertise & resources
(For example, research findings national TA centers that have an expertise, (JAN), local consumer-operated organizations, state Offices of Consumer Affairs, SAMHSA/CMHS, web resources)

Strategies

● Cornerstone for Success

Sustained interest, support and involvement by Executive leadership—regular meetings with supervisors and peer staff to problem-solve, brainstorm, and assist with inter-departmental issues

● Getting the most from outside expertise and resources

Integrate into organization training; link supervisors to Job Accommodations Network, <http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu>
Bring in experts to share and train.

Stigma

- Staff resent staff who receive reasonable accommodations—Over monitoring and tattletelling often result
- Hinders integration and creates divisive work culture—costly for managers and supervisors
- Clear performance standards for each role and clear expectations for ALL employees.
- Supervision is critical for ALL employees.

Supervision vs. Support

- Supervision helps ALL employees perform their essential functions of their job to the best of their ability
- Supports assist a person with psychiatric disability (who can do the essential functions of their job) to function independently in their work (reasonable accommodations)
- In fact, all employees may need support from time to time.

Learned Experiences

- Develop clear (but flexible) job descriptions and expectations based on critical competencies.
- Differentiate supervision and support.
- Invest in developing skilled supervisors.
- Identify and provide useful reasonable accommodations.
- Monitor supervisor's supervisory skills.
- Support supervisors in their roles.

Support Experiences

- Be aware of the personal challenges ALL workers experience from time-to-time.
- Support person to perform his/her role.
- Define the types and intensity of support the program is able/unable to provide.
- Consistently provide all that is within the definition of support.
- Link employees who need additional support to additional resources.

For example: REACH

www.bu.edu/cpr/reasacom/employ-faq.html

<http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu>

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