

What Every Employee Assistance Professional Should Know About Working Caregiver Issues

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Cost of End-of-Life Issues for Employers

The financial costs related to the issue of caregiving, which includes serious illness and concurrent emotional issues, have a significant impact on the workplace. US businesses lose from \$17.1 billion to \$33.6 billion per year in productivity due to the impact of care giving responsibilities on full-time employees (MetLife/NAC, 2006). The annual cost of grieving in the workplace is estimated to be \$75.1 billion (Grief Recovery Institute).

As the Baby Boom generation ages, employers will be affected in a number of ways:

- The aging of the U.S. population will place an increasing number of families in the position of providing logistical, emotional, financial, medical and/or physical support to an older adult.
- Decreasing family size will mean that fewer adults will be available to provide assistance when it is needed.
- Because of delayed childbearing, families may need to carry out both eldercare and childcare responsibilities at the same time.
- The involvement of women in the workplace, currently at nearly 80%, will ensure that family needs will continue to be a factor in the workplace.
- The demand for workplace eldercare programs and family-friendly employers is likely to increase (Family Caregiver Alliance 2003)

The Role of the Employee Assistance Professional

Research has shown that supportive EAPs, work-life programs, benefits, and policies positively affect an employer's bottom line by increasing workforce loyalty, morale, and productivity. According to a FamilyCare *America* report, "A number of surveys demonstrate that employers who make "softer benefits" available reap the rewards of employee loyalty and productivity. At DuPont, employees who took advantage of Work/Life programs were 45 percent more likely to "go the extra mile" and reported fewer instances of burnout. Other studies, by companies like Johnson & Johnson and IBM, showed that such programs play a key role in influencing a worker's decision to stay with the company." (Family Care 2002)

Employee assistance professionals are in a unique position to provide employers with a valuable benefit – helping them to support their employees while cutting employer costs. The mere act of raising awareness of these issues to employers is significant – many employers are not aware how many of their employees are

affected by end-of-life issues or what the costs to the employer are. Increasing awareness of end-of-life needs in the workplace will help the employer to become more sensitive and supportive to employees who are facing these issues.

EAP's can provide the following supportive services to employees, thereby increasing employee productivity and employee commitment to employer:

- Resources and support to employees who are family caregivers, helping them to maintain a healthy balance between work and life;
- Increase employer awareness of working caregiver issues and ways employers can help;
- Educate supervisors in identifying and referring seriously ill employees so they can continue functioning in the workplace as long as possible;
- Provide support and resource materials to co-workers who are working with a seriously ill co-worker or when a co-worker has died;
- Offer materials and experts to help employers/employees understand grief and the process of grieving.

Challenge for Workers

As the population ages, the number of working caregivers and the effect that their increased responsibilities has on the workplace will grow:

- 44 million Americans, approximately 16% of the population, now provide unpaid care to an adult relative or friend.
- An estimated 15.9 million caregivers work full-time.
- Twenty-nine percent of employed caregivers report needing help to balance their work and family responsibilities (NAC 2004)

Providing hands-on or long-distance care giving while working can be emotionally and logistically demanding. Supervisors of working caregivers may observe changes in performance, attendance, or emotional presence in their employees. With the right training, well-prepared supervisors can reduce stress by referring employees to the EAP where they can obtain emotional support, and referrals to resources. In addition, companies can provide flextime to help employees balance home and work responsibilities.

The EAP is the provider that can offer these tools to employers!

Absenteeism is the most frequently reported eldercare issue in the workplace (SHRM 2003). An estimated average of one hour per week for 50 weeks per year is lost to partial absenteeism of caregivers, for example, leaving early or coming in late.

Historically, caregiving has been viewed as a women's issue; however, men are often involved in handling the financial costs related to caregiving, and that burden can have a significant impact on their workplace performance.

Resources for the EA Professional

The National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO) offers a comprehensive website, training materials, information and phone support. The National Workplace Initiative is offered at no cost throughout the US by contacting 1-800-658-8898 or www.caringinfo.org.

References

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