

Creating lasting behavioral change for health care employees

In the demanding world of health care, the well-being of employees plays a crucial role not only in their own lives, but also in the quality of patient care. Yet, the ongoing battle against employee burnout, stress, and other mental health challenges remains a daunting one. The toll of these issues on hospitals and other health care settings is undeniable, leading to reduced productivity, high turnover, and even the emergence of harmful coping mechanisms, including substance use disorder. For example, in a 2022 survey, more than 1 in 5 physicians said they consume alcohol or controlled substances multiple times per day.¹

Health care employers can play a pivotal role in mitigating these risks by adopting an integrated, holistic approach to their health benefits. By offering accessible and relevant behavioral health and substance use support in a proactive manner, they can empower workers to prioritize their well-being, fostering a healthier, more resilient workforce dedicated to providing exceptional patient care.

Getting to the root of risk factors

Health care workers bear the weight of workplace stressors and demands that can contribute to a higher risk of numerous health conditions. These include anxiety, depression, and musculoskeletal conditions², as well as obesity and diabetes³, alongside the closely linked issue of substance use, which can significantly impact mental and physical health.⁴

Several underlying causes drive the increased risk of poor mental health and unhealthy coping habits among health care workers:

- The lingering effects of "pandemic PTSD" have led many hospital workers to self-medicate to deal with ongoing work pressures.⁵
- Job stress is a constant companion for health care professionals⁶, compounded by the unique stressors related to caring for patients and their families.
- Working conditions, such as shift work, time pressure, and lack of adequate time for self-care, further contribute to the cumulative toll on employee well-being.

Recognizing these root causes is crucial for health care employers seeking to create a supportive environment that focuses on the well-being of their workforce.

Addressing the long-standing stigma of mental illness

Many health care workers hesitate to seek help for mental health issues, including getting much-needed substance use support, due to the pervasive stigma that continues to surround these conditions.⁷

"There's still the stigma associated with mental health and substance use issues that prevents people from asking for help sooner," said Dr. Douglas Nemecek, chief medical officer for Behavioral Health at Evernorth, the health services division of The Cigna Group. "To feel better, they try to fix it themselves. They start down the path of self-medication, which can create problems at home and at work and puts them at risk of spiraling into a substance use disorder."

To address this, employers can implement behavioral health programs that are easy-to-access and confidential, so that employees feel comfortable seeking the care they need.

Cigna Healthcare's Confide Behavioral Health NavigatorSM acts as a virtual front door that connects employees to mental health treatment and support 24/7/365, seamlessly and confidentially. Going above and beyond a typical employee assistance program, it provides individualized clinical guidance, a digital portal for simple assessment and care recommendations. This concierge service connects members to a live behavioral health advocate, via click to chat and live by phone options. And we follow up on 100% of interactions to ensure members have been connected to support from the right provider.

The need for an integrated, holistic approach

An integrated, holistic approach to employee health benefits addresses mental illness and substance use while recognizing the relationship between these issues and the chronic medical conditions that often coexist, such as hypertension, obesity, and type 2 diabetes. "Chronic health conditions can be linked to higher rates of depression and anxiety," said Dr. Nemecek, emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive approach.



To keep workers healthy and on the job, employers must provide solutions that reflect the realities of the workplace. For true sustainable change to take place, hospitals and other health care companies should focus on the whole health and well-being of their staff with both large- and small-scale health and lifestyle solutions that can make a big difference. Even in situations where the workplace or role has inherent challenges that may be slower to change, helping employees modify their behavior and manage risks will be better for the employee and the employer.

Cigna Total Behavioral Health is an integrated solution that supports every aspect of a person's health with the goal of lasting behavioral change. It combines inpatient and outpatient case management with a full suite of specialty coaching and programs focused on specific conditions, including SUD support. It can also identify individuals with depression and anxiety who are not receiving outpatient care and help them navigate to affordable and convenient digital coaching and virtual care options.

By understanding what employees are dealing with, in real time, this personalized care program encourages employees to engage in and prioritize their own health, which benefits health care workers, their employers, and the patients they care for.

"What we do with Total Behavioral Health is really make sure we bring a comprehensive approach and use our data – medical claims, pharmacy claims, number of ER visits, and more – to help find people who maybe aren't getting identified or aren't being seen or aren't willing to raise their hand because of stigma," said Dr. Nemecek. "From there, it's about making all of our resources and support options available so we can connect each individual with the resource that's best going to meet their needs for confidentiality, privacy, simplicity, and convenience."

Reaching the pinnacle of your organization's health

The imperative for health care organizations to deliver better mental health support is greater now than ever. When it comes down to it, your organization is only as healthy as your employees, and neglecting the well-being of health care workers can have far-reaching consequences.



Creating a supportive culture of health encourages employees to seek the help they need– but it only works when employers offer solutions that are accessible, relevant, and worth employees' time and energy. When you invest in employees' well-being with solutions that are confidential, easy to access, and personalized, you not only bolster the health and well-being of your workforce, but also foster a healthier and more resilient workplace. And ultimately, you'll enhance the quality of care provided to patients and set the stage for a prosperous future.

It's time to move beyond fragmented benefits to a truly integrated health plan that positions your organization for optimal health and growth. Reach out to a Cigna Healthcare representative or your broker today.

Cigna Health and Life Insurance Company

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¹ All Points North, “2022 State of Mental Health: American Healthcare Workers Report”, Jul. 2022

² National Institutes of Health, National Library of Medicine, “Effectiveness of Workplace Interventions to Improve Health and Well-Being of Health and Social Service Workers: A Narrative Review of Randomised Controlled Trials”, Jun. 2023

³ National Institutes of Health, National Library of Medicine, “Prevalence of diagnosed diabetes among employed U.S. adults by demographic characteristics and occupation, 36 states, 2014–2018”, Apr. 2021

⁴ American Psychiatric Association, “Chronic Pain and Mental Health Often Interconnected”, Nov. 2020.

⁵ National Institutes of Health, National Library of Medicine, “Increased Substance Use among Nurses during the COVID-19 Pandemic”, Feb. 2023

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), “Healthcare Workers and Work Stress”, Jun. 2023

⁷ National Institutes of Health, National Library of Medicine, “Perceived stigma, substance use and self-medication in night-shift healthcare workers: a qualitative study”, May 2022

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