

Behavioral Health Benefits Have Positive Impact on Productivity, Absenteeism

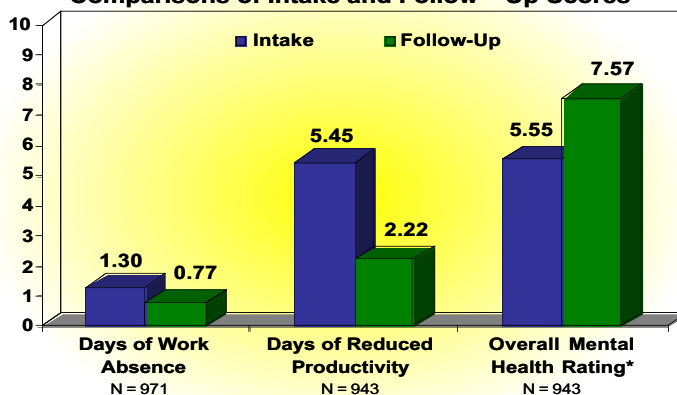
By Kristina L. Greenwood, Ph.D., and Sonny Phipps, M.B.A.

Behavioral health benefits, including EAPs and mental health/substance abuse programs, have a statistically significant positive impact on absenteeism and workplace performance, as well as on employees' mental health, according to recent findings from an ongoing study by ValueOptions.

In 2003 ValueOptions initiated a workplace outcomes study to examine the impact behavioral health programs had on workplace productivity and absenteeism. In this ongoing study, researchers conduct interviews with adults employed by ValueOptions' commercial clients as part of the routine information collection process that occurs at the time a member calls ValueOptions for a referral. Members are asked about their levels of productivity, absenteeism, and mental health status in the preceding month. Researchers then contact a sample of these members three months later to complete a follow-up survey.

Results So Far. Researchers found a statistically significant improvement in work performance for members who complete at least one session with a mental health provider. Members reported less absenteeism, increased productivity, and substantial improvement in overall mental health, as shown below.

CHART 1
Comparisons of Intake and Follow-Up Scores



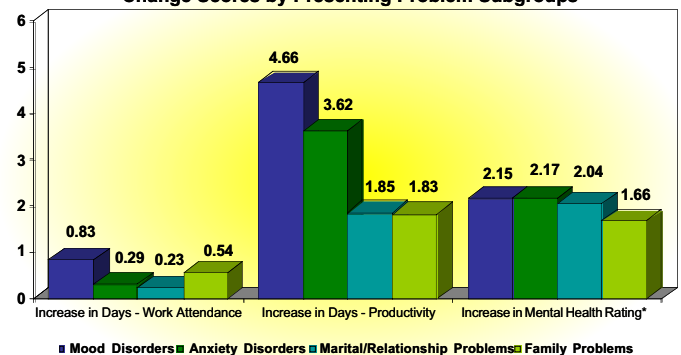
* Rating on a scale from 1 to 10; higher scores indicate better mental health.

Mood Disorders Top the List. The most frequent problems presented by members were mood disorders, marital/relationship problems, anxiety disorders, and family problems. Survey responses from members with mood disorders demonstrated the greatest impact on the workplace. These members averaged two full days of absence from work and eight days of reduced productivity on the job. Those with other problems reported at least a half-day of absence from work and three to six days of reduced productivity.

In addition, the overall mental health status ratings demonstrated the relative severity of the presenting problems and their impact on members' ability to function in the workplace. Again, mood disorders had the greatest impact, followed by anxiety disorders, marital/relationship problems, and family problems, respectively.

Chart 2 displays the average change from initial intake to follow-up based on the type of presenting problem.

CHART 2
Change Scores by Presenting Problem Subgroups



* Rating on a scale from 1 to 10; higher scores indicate better mental health.

Good News for Employers. Overall, the results of the study were extremely positive. Members with mood disorders who sought treatment demonstrated the greatest degree of improvement at work, especially related to increased productivity. Given the prevalence of mood disorders in the workforce and the fact that these members experienced the most impaired functioning when they began treatment, this finding is especially encouraging news for employers.

ValueOptions develops and implements managed behavioral health and EAP program services for Fortune 500 companies, national and regional health plans, as well as federal, state, and local governments.—www.valueoptions.com

The most common mood disorders are depression and bipolar disorder, also known as manic-depressive illness.—National Mental Health Information Center



These results support previous studies that have demonstrated the effectiveness and value of behavioral health interventions.

With proper treatment, the high costs of behavioral health problems in the workplace are increasingly avoidable. Timely and appropriate behavioral health interventions can help employees avoid prolonged losses in productivity and reduce unnecessary absenteeism—resulting in significant cost savings for employers and demonstrating a clear return on investment for behavioral health services. ♦

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