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HR Executives Rank Mental Illness #1 for Effect on Indirect Costs

“Innerworkings: A Look at Mental Health in Today’s Workplace” Survey
Finds Stigma and Low Awareness Hinder Progress

(May 31, 2007) - Washington, DC/Arlington, VA - *Employee Benefit News*, a leading publication for HR professionals, and the Partnership for Workplace Mental Health, a program of the American Psychiatric Foundation, today released the results of a national survey in which employers from across the country selected mental illness as the health issue that has the most effect on indirect costs. Despite this ranking, the “Innerworkings: A Look at Mental Health in Today’s Workplace” survey also points to an overwhelming need for better education of frontline managers and employees on this critical health issue. An article about the survey appears this month’s issue of *Employee Benefit News*.

“The survey shows that there is a compelling need for workplace programs that raise awareness about not only the prevalence and cost of mental illness, but also about the availability of effective treatments,” said Clare Miller, Director of the Partnership for Workplace Mental Health.

“Innerworkings: A Look at Mental Health in Today’s Workplace” surveyed more than 500 people including human resource and employee benefit managers from companies of all sizes across the country. Key findings include:

- Respondents said mental illness has more effect on lost productivity, increased absenteeism and other indirect costs than any other health issue. Nearly one-third (31 percent) ranked it first; this is more than twice the number that selected “back problems,” which came in second at 14 percent. Substance abuse, asthma/allergies and smoking followed closely behind at 10 percent or less.
- Less than one-quarter of respondents said they believe that managers in their companies have an overall understanding of the toll mental illness takes on a person and family members.
- Two-thirds of respondents said that their companies do not provide managers with education on mental health issues.
- Three-quarters of respondents said that employees may not seek treatment because “they do not realize they are ill or believe they can solve the problem on their own.”
- When respondents were asked to rank which health screening procedures their companies actively encourage via reminders, information, etc., mental illness came in last. The majority of companies (70 percent) recommend mammograms and blood pressure monitoring, nearly half encourage weight management and one-quarter recommend bone density tests. However, only 12 percent said that their companies encourage screening for mental illness.
- Eighty percent of respondents said that “shame and stigma” may still be associated with a mental illness diagnosis.

“HR leaders are clearly concerned about the impact mental illness is having on their companies,” said Lynn Gresham, Senior Editor, *Employee Benefit News* and Director, Benefitnews.com. “They see the waste of potential and are looking for solutions. If we can raise awareness and reduce the stigma, more people who need treatment will actually get it.”

The majority of Innerworkings respondents said that their companies provide mental health benefits (90 percent) and employee assistance programs (76 percent). According to the National Institute of Mental Health, more than 80 percent of people with depressive disorders improve when they receive appropriate treatment. However, a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Surgeon General Report found that less than one-third of adults with a diagnosable mental disorder receive treatment in any given year.

The cost of untreated mental illness is substantial. A 2006 study published in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* found that a worker with depression averaged 27.2 lost workdays annually due to absence or poor functioning on the job and that someone with bipolar disorder averaged 65.5 days. It estimated that annual indirect costs per employee were \$4,426 for someone with major depressive disorders and \$9,619 for bipolar disorder, and that those conditions cost the U.S. workplace more than \$50 billion each year.

Case studies of successful corporate mental health programs can be found on The Partnership for Workplace Mental Health’s website, www.workplacementalhealth.org. “Investing in employees’ mental health is one of the most cost-effective things a company can do,” said Miller. “These programs have a direct impact on productivity, morale and motivation.”

“Innerworkings: A Look at Mental Health in Today’s Workplace” Background

The “Innerworkings: A Look at Mental Health in Today’s Workplace” survey report includes a list of mental health resources, detailed charts and statistics. The report is available on the Partnership for Workplace Mental Health website or by clicking [here](#).

Both the Partnership and *Employee Benefit News* posted the survey on their sites in early 2007 and e-mailed it to subscribers and constituents – primarily corporate executives with HR, benefits and/or financial management responsibilities. There were 515 respondents, who represented just about every state and more than 50 different industry sectors. While more than half said their companies have over 500 employees and more than one-quarter over 3,000, small businesses were also represented with one-quarter having less than 100 employees. The survey was developed through a charitable contribution from AstraZeneca Pharmaceuticals LP.

About Employee Benefit News

Since 1987, *Employee Benefit News (EBN)* has been the leading publication serving employee benefits decision makers. It provides comprehensive, useful coverage of the ever-changing business of employee benefits. *EBN* readers rely on the magazine for: alerts on industry trends, economic and government activities; benchmarking data by organization size, employment sector and region; case studies of innovative programs; commentary by the field's thought leaders and news on products and services.

About The Partnership for Workplace Mental Health

The Partnership for Workplace Mental Health, a program of the American Psychiatric Foundation, advances effective employer approaches to mental health by combining the knowledge and experience of the American Psychiatric Association and its employer partners – leading corporate, government and non-profit organizations. The partnership delivers educational materials and provides a forum to explore mental health issues and share innovative solutions. It promotes the business case for quality mental health care, including early recognition, access to care and effective treatment.

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