The Emergency Protocol You've Likely Overlooked

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Mental and emotional health has moved to the forefront of the conversation. Employers are presented with the challenge to incorporate mental health benefits for a continuum of emotional and behavioral illnesses. Everything from stress and anxiety, to addiction, depression, and mental illness. The most successful businesses remove the stigma, creating an environment where employee mental wellness is viewed with the same veracity as other medical conditions.

Emergencies happen all the time. You probably have fire escape protocols and drills to prepare for evacuation. You have natural disaster plans and backup generators. So, with the conversation

about mental illness becoming more and more commonplace, have you communicated the protocols that should be followed in the case of an employee mental health emergency?

1 in 5 U.S. adults experience mental illness each year

1 in 25 U.S. adults experience serious mental illness each year

1 in 6 U.S. youth aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year

Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among people aged 10-34

Statistics from: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Department of Justice.

Anticipating the risk of crisis is part of the answer when dealing with crisis. Here are four steps to begin creating your mental health crisis plan.

1. ***Mental health training:*** Mental health First Aid is a course that teaches participants how to recognize, understand, and respond to someone who may be experiencing a crisis related to mental health or substance abuse. Find classes near you through Mental Health First Aid USA.

2. ***Engagement:*** If your benefit package includes employee assistance plans (EAP), or other mental health benefits, inform your employees of the full scope of the benefit. This may mean in person, with distributed literature, flyers in the bathroom—wherever makes sense in your organization to be sure employees are familiar with the benefit when they need it.

3. *Signs and Symptoms:*

There are typically clues leading up to and during a mental health emergency. They could be as simple as poor work from a high performer, unusual or increased absences as well as some other common signs and symptoms listed below:

- Excessive worrying or fear
- Feeling excessively sad or low
- Confused thinking or problems concentrating and learning
- Extreme mood changes, including uncontrollable "highs" or feelings of euphoria
- Prolonged or strong feelings of irritability or anger
- Avoiding friends and social activities

- Difficulties understanding or relating to other people
- Changes in sleeping habits or feeling tired and low energy
- Changes in eating habits such as increased hunger or lack of appetite
- Difficulty perceiving reality (delusions or hallucinations, in which a person experiences and senses things that don't exist in objective reality)
- Inability to perceive changes in one's own feelings, behavior or personality ("lack of insight" or anosognosia)
- Abuse of substances like alcohol or drugs

4. *Phone and text hotlines:*

Keep important phone numbers and hotlines readily available for employees.

1-800-950-NAMI

NAMI helpline is staffed by people successfully living with mental illness and their family members.

1-800-273-8255

National Suicide Prevention Hotline

An emergency response plan should be a small part of a much greater effort to support mental health in the workplace. Create your plan with a preventative mindset, giving your employees the best possible environment to be their best.

A true effort to support mental illness also reflects positively on the productivity of the business. McLean Hospital published an article citing data from the American Psychiatric Association stating that,

"employees with unresolved depression experience a 35% reduction in productivity, contributing to a loss to the US economy of $210.5 billion a year in absenteeism, reduced productivity, and medical costs."

The final piece to supporting employees' mental health is to destigmatize it in the workplace. Cultivate an open mindset that supports all employees whether they deal with heart disease or mental illness.