



## **Topics of Interest**

**For more information contact:**

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## **Staying Mentally Healthy in the Workplace: Mental Health Month Emphasizes Awareness**

**Tampa, Fla. (April 16, 2003) — May is Mental Health Month, an observance begun more than 50 years ago to increase public awareness of mental health and illness. Led by the National Mental Health Association (NMHA), the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare (NCCBH) and organizations throughout the country, the effort for 2003 places special emphasis on mental health in the workplace.**

**Although people spend far more time addressing their physical health than their mental health, mental illness is more common than cancer, lung and heart disease combined. And untreated mental illness can complicate many minor and serious physical disorders. Caring for your own mental health is key to living a full and productive life.**

### **Supportive Environment Counters Stigma**

**“While much progress has been made, and help is readily available, many people with mental health problems still do not seek help because of the stigma associated with mental illness,” says Tampa clinical occupational psychologist, Gary L. Wood, Psy.D. “The stigma can be the worst part of having a disorder. People may experience feelings of shame, concerns about job security and fear of rejection by their colleagues, and this can become overwhelming to the point that it interferes with productivity.”**

**Many innovative employers have learned that addressing their employees’ mental health needs makes good economic sense. They also recognize that they play an essential role in their workers’ mental health not only by offering adequate**

**insurance coverage for mental health care and access to an Employee Assistance Program, but also by creating an environment that supports people who need help.**

**One way employees can help counter the stigma of mental illness is by being aware of the language they use. Labels like “crazy,” “loony” or “nuts” can be unintentionally hurtful. The NMHA also encourages “people-first” language, which puts a human face on mental illness. For example, instead of the term “a schizophrenic,” saying instead “a person with schizophrenia” can make a subtle but important difference in creating a stigma-free workplace.**

## **217 Million Workdays Lost**

**Depression is the top workplace problem, followed by family crisis and stress. All workers can experience family, mental health and personal problems that affect their health, job satisfaction and productivity. Each year, 217 million workdays are completely or partially lost among employees with mental disorders aged 18 through 54, amounting to \$17 billion in lost productivity. And unfortunately, 66 percent of the 28 million employees with mental disorders do not receive treatment.**

**It’s important for employees at all levels to learn about mental illness, stress and wellness, in addition to the signs and symptoms of mental health disorders. It’s good for staff to have an understanding of what employer-provided benefits and services are available. Supervisors should receive training on how to intervene appropriately if they think an employee may have a mental health problem. Your EAP provider can assist with the implementation of such education and training, as well as counseling for people with mental health problems or concerns.**

## **Signs of Depression**

**Every year more than 19 million American adults experience clinical depression. It affects men, women and children of all races and socioeconomic groups, causing them to lose motivation, energy and the pleasure of everyday life. Clinical depression often goes untreated because people don’t recognize its many symptoms. The good news is that almost everyone who gets treated can soon feel better.**

**If you experience five or more of the symptoms below for longer than two weeks, or if symptoms are severe enough to interfere with your daily routine, see your doctor or a qualified mental health professional.**

## 10 Symptoms of Clinical Depression

- A persistent sad, anxious or “empty” mood
- Sleeping too little or sleeping too much
- Reduced appetite and weight loss or increased appetite and weight gain
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed
- Restlessness or irritability
- Persistent physical symptoms that don’t respond to treatment (such as headaches, chronic pain, or constipation and other digestive disorders)
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feeling guilty, hopeless or worthless
- Thoughts of death or suicide

(For more specific information on how mental illness can affect children, adolescents and older individuals, see the fact sheets under the “Mental Health Information” at [www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org))

## Tips to Improve Your Mental Health

The National Mental Health Association offers the following tips to help you put things in perspective in a way that will enhance your mental health. If you are receiving treatment for a mental health problem, these tips can help you manage your illness and support your treatment and recovery.

**Relax.** Meditate, take a walk, or reach out spiritually through prayer. Quiet reflection, alone or in the company of others, can improve your state of mind and strengthen your sense of self.

**Make a plan.** Early in the week, decide what tasks you need to complete for the week and make a plan for when and how to do them. If you are overscheduled, decide what can

wait. If you don't have much on your schedule, plan some activities to which you will look forward.

**Surround yourself with supportive people.** Make plans with family members and friends, or seek out activities at which you can meet new people, such as a club, class or support group.

**Take care of your body.** Taking care of yourself physically can improve your mental health. Be sure to eat nutritious meals, avoid cigarettes, drink alcohol only in moderation, drink plenty of water, get enough sleep and exercise regularly.

**Give of yourself.** Volunteer your time and energy to help someone else. You'll feel good about doing something tangible to help someone in need—and it's a great way to meet new people who share your interests and compassion.

**Broaden your horizons.** Create a change of pace or expand your interests. Explore a new hobby, plant a garden, plan a road trip, try a new restaurant, take dance lessons, or learn to play an instrument or speak another language.

**Value yourself.** Treat yourself with kindness and respect and avoid self-criticism. Take stock of the qualities you like about yourself: your accomplishments and abilities. Take some time every day to relax, reflect and rejuvenate.

## **Your Employer-Provided EAP is Ready to Help**

**Your employer cares, and for your benefit provides you and your family the resources of an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to help you work through any problems that might affect your ability to function in the workplace, including mental health concerns. For more information about the specifics of your company's program call 813-870-0392 (Hillsborough County, Florida), 727-576-5164 (Pinellas County, Florida) or 800-343-4670 (toll free) or visit [www.woodassociates.net/eap.htm](http://www.woodassociates.net/eap.htm)**

## **Additional Resources**

**The National Mental Health Association at [www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org) offers a wealth of free information and timely news about mental health topics.**

## **About Wood & Associates**

**Wood & Associates is an employee assistance and behavioral health consulting firm that helps employers maintain productivity, safety and behavioral health in the workplace. Wood & Associates is a pioneer in the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) industry and has served employers and employees in the greater Tampa Bay area and elsewhere since 1982. The firm's diverse group of clients includes a number of major employers who also contract for its mental health and substance abuse services.**

**Patricia N. Alexander earned a Ph.D. in mental health counseling at the University of Florida. Trained in critical incident stress management through the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, she is a Florida licensed mental health counselor and nationally certified counselor. Through her work experience she has addressed all types of critical incident situations, including explosions, multiple homicides, suicides, line-of-duty deaths, serious accidents and robberies. Alexander conducts training on stress management for law enforcement and businesses, and has developed peer support programs for law enforcement and industry.**

**Gary L. Wood, Psy.D., founder of the Wood & Associates consulting practice, is a pioneer in the field of Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services. Since 1979, his practice has centered on providing solutions to employee and organizational problems. Wood is a licensed clinical psychologist, a member of The National Register of Health Service Providers in Psychology, and a graduate of Rutgers University, West Georgia College and Mercer University.**