

Thursday, June 19, 2014

MEMORANDUM FOR: Heads Of Executive Departments And Agencies

FROM: Katherine Archuleta, Director
Pamela S. Hyde, J.D., Administrator Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Subject: Federal Workplace Conversations about Mental Health

Mental health is an important issue in the workplace. It is a state of well-being in which an individual achieves his or her own potential, copes effectively with the normal challenges of life, and is able to work more efficiently and productively. When an employee has a mental health concern or significant stress, timely access to mental health services and support can facilitate prompt recovery and avert a crisis.

Mental health can be a delicate balance, with problems developing over a series of adverse circumstances. Individuals at risk may demonstrate an inability to make decisions, repeatedly miss deadlines, be late to work, or exhibit distractibility and a general lack of focus. We need to do everything we can to provide employees and their supervisors with tools to recognize impending problems and be able to respond appropriately.

People of all ages and backgrounds are affected by mental health challenges. This year, one in five Americans over age 18 will experience a mental health condition. Many will experience substance abuse themselves or in their families. In a 3-month period, adults with depression miss an average of 4.8 workdays, and each year employees with depression cost employers an estimated \$17 to \$44 billion in lost productivity. Nearly 500 million workdays are lost annually due to alcohol abuse. Employees who use drugs are likely to have absences of 8 days or more annually. These numbers do not include the many workers whose productivity is impacted by concerns about children, spouses, and other loved ones with mental health challenges. With proper support, the majority of individuals return to good health and productive lives.

Fewer than half of Americans needing mental health care receive it. Unrecognized and untreated mental health issues can lead to serious consequences. Regrettably, suicide is a leading cause of death among working-age Americans, the second leading cause of death for people 25-34 years old, and the fourth leading cause of death for people 35-54 years old. Every suicide profoundly affects the family, co-workers, and community of the victim.

In June 2013, President Obama called attention to the overarching need to improve mental health when he convened the National Conference on Mental Health at the White House. Together, the President and Vice President have been focused on increasing public awareness of mental health issues, reducing negative attitudes, and encouraging people to seek help when needed. Further, in September 2012, the U.S. Surgeon General published the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention (<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/national-strategy-suicide-prevention/>) in collaboration with the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention. The report highlights Federal Agency and employers' role in a coordinated approach to suicide prevention.

The Office of Personnel Management and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration recognize the critical role that health programs available through a worksite can play in reducing risk for mental health problems and suicide. A supportive worksite:

- educates workers on the basics of mental health and the signs of distress (including suicide warning signs);
- decreases concerns associated with seeking help; and
- enhances emotional health through social connectedness, resilience, and improved problem-solving skills.

Effective and confidential Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) can assist in managing individual, family, or workplace stress before a crisis develops. The EAP can provide support, access to short-term behavioral health services, and referrals for ongoing care. Federal employees and families can also access mental health services and substance use disorder treatment through their Federal Employees Health Benefits insurance plans.

As a top Agency leader, you can start a workplace conversation that will positively impact mental health and well-being. To begin, please share the attached fact sheets throughout your organization. They highlight key resources to increase awareness and access to services when needed. Your EAP administrators, benefits officers, and health unit personnel are also important sources of information to support this conversation within your Agency. More detail can also be found at www.mentalhealth.gov.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Working together, we can help ensure a healthier Federal workforce and timely assistance for those in need.

cc: Chief Human Capital Officers, and Human Resources Directors