

AS@W...FOR BUSINESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS

Why should businesses and organizations be concerned with mental health issues?

Informed organizations are increasingly becoming aware of the personal and productivity costs of mental ill health, and the associated importance of fostering and maintaining the mental health of their employees. They recognize that most work involves skills such as concentration, problem-solving and planning, and that these are often the very areas that are compromised when an employee is experiencing low mood or depression. They therefore recognize the need to attend to early signs of an emerging mental health condition by equipping managers and employees with timely and effective knowledge, resources and tools. AS@W is intended to be a key component in a comprehensive approach. While the primary goal of such efforts is to assist employees with low mood or depression, an additional benefit is the provision of a clear message to current and prospective employees that the company cares about their well-being. This, in turn, serves to attract new recruits and retain existing staff, thus sustaining the vitality and productivity of the organization and being consistent with core business values and objectives.

Who would find AS@W of value?

There are a number of individuals within an organization who may benefit from the availability of AS@W:

- New employees who are entering the workforce and want to know about available resources and supports.
- Current staff at risk for low mood or depression due to personal risk factors (e.g., being a new parent) or workplace risk factors (e.g., taking on a new position).
- Individuals who have clinical depression who are remaining at work or who are returning to work after a depression-related absence.
- Managers or supervisors responsible for attending to the performance of others
- Human Resources professionals involved in recruitment, benefits design or attendance management.
- Occupational Health and Safety teams responsible for attending to workplace risks, accidents or illnesses.
- Disability management personnel assisting with successful and sustained work return.
- Employees wanting to maintain good psychological self-care skills.



AS@W Antidepressant Skills at Work Dealing with Mood Problems in the Workplace

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How can businesses and organizations use AS@W?

- Provide information about AS@W when recruiting, interviewing and orienting new staff members, along with information about other company programs, policies and procedures. Information, such as brochures or contact cards, about AS@W can be included in the orientation materials about company programs and benefits that are provided to prospective or new employees.
- Consider informing employees about AS@W when accidents, incidents or changes in employee attendance, performance or other behaviour are observed, as these may be signs of low mood or depression. The intent is not to suggest that an employee is depressed, but rather to indicate appropriate concern and to offer support and resources.
- Managers, supervisors and other concerned personnel benefit from education and training programs to raise awareness, reduce stigma and enhance skills in addressing workplace mental health. AS@W can be a core component of such training.
- Employees may inform managers, union representatives or Human Resources personnel that they are experiencing depression. While it is not their role to directly provide assessment or treatment services, **such personnel can be of value by informing the employee of AS@W, along with other relevant policies, benefits or programs.**
- Consider AS@W In the course of developing or renewing employee benefits and services. For example, if an organization has an Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP), it is beneficial if EFAP providers are informed about and requested to be trained in the use of the guide in their work with clients.

Key considerations for businesses and organizations

- The role of an employer is not to diagnose or treat depression.** This would be inappropriate, invasive and potentially destructive. Employee privacy and confidentiality must be respected.
- AS@W is not intended as a substitute for provision of mental health care.** Nor is it in lieu of other organizational programs and services that are relevant to employee mental health, such as Employee and Family Assistance Programs or extended health plans.
- Organizations benefit from creating and sustaining psychologically healthy workplaces that have a culture that supports everyone to work together guided by values of respect, growth and integrity in order to promote both productivity and well-being. A comprehensive to workplace mental health involves not only enhancing employee skills and resources, but also identifying and eliminating or mitigating psychosocial hazards that may exist in the workplace or organization.



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- ❑ **Early identification and appropriate intervention serve to minimize the presence, degree and duration of depression-related disability.** Employee screening for depression can be of considerable value, provided that individuals who screen positive are provided with readily available, effective and confidential access to mental health assessment and treatment.
- ❑ The majority of depressed workers are not on disability: they are still at work, although they may exhibit various degrees of *presenteeism* – or reduced productivity. Remaining at work may be appropriate, unless remaining at work is exacerbating their depression, significantly compromising the productivity of the work team, or placing the individual or others at risk of harm. **To the extent possible, it is beneficial for the employer and employee to consider informal accommodations that will permit the worker to remain at work in a safe and productive manner,** while engaging in self-care and/or treatment.
- ❑ Enhancement of employee awareness, competence and confidence in mental health self-care is only one component of integrated disability management. **Workplace and organizational factors that create a psychologically healthy and supportive workplace and support staff in their efforts at self-care are integral.** This may include remaining cognizant of issues such as employee workload, opportunities for recognition and development and maintenance of appropriate work-life balance.
- ❑ **Anyone within an organization may suffer from depression or low mood;** in fact the demands of leadership can be an added risk. All, levels of leadership should be mindful about their psychological health and model good self-care. AS@W can help.

Further Reading

Bilsker, D., Gilbert, M., Myette, L., Stewart-Patterson, Chris. (2004). *Depression and work function: Bridging the gap between mental health and the workplace*. Vancouver, BC: Mental Health Evaluation and Community Consultation Unit. Available at: http://www.carmha.ca/publications/resources/dwf/Work_Depression.pdf

Canadian Centre for Management Development. (2002). *A fine balance: A manager's guide to workplace well-being*. Ottawa, Ontario: Canada School of Public Service. Available at: http://www.cspc-efpc.gc.ca/research/publications/html/workplace/wp_1_e.html?r=1.

Sanderson, K., & Anderson, G. (2006). Common mental disorders in the workforce: Recent findings from descriptive social epidemiology. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 51(2), 63-75.



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ABOUT AS@W

How was *Antidepressant Skills at Work* developed?

The guide was developed by British Columbia Mental Health and Addiction Services (BCM HAS), an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority. The guide and accompanying materials have been authored by **Dr. Dan Bilsker**, **Dr. Merv Gilbert**, and **Dr. Joti Samra** – registered psychologists and scientist-practitioners with expertise in issues relating to workplace mental health. These psychologists are with the Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addiction (CARMHA), Faculty of Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University. The guide was written on the basis of a review of the scientific literature; consultation with employer, union, mental health provider and employee groups; and adaptation of existing self-care depression programs.

How can the manual be accessed?

The manual is available for viewing and free download at www.carmha.ca, under Publications and Workplace Mental Health or from www.bcmhas.ca/research. Individuals or organizations are free to print and make multiple copies of the guide, with permission from CARMHA (publications@carmha.ca). Print copies and audio CDs are available at a low cost from Rebel Communications (604-214-9695 or 1-866-678-5484 or info@rebelcom.ca).

For further information about AS@W and associated resources and materials, please visit www.carmha.ca/antidepressant-skills/work/. This information will be updated on a regular basis.



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