

AS@W...FOR HUMAN RESOURCES PERSONNEL

Why should human resources personnel be concerned with workplace mental health?

Given their responsibility for the 'people side' of the organization, human resources professionals are most likely to be aware of the well-being and health of individual employees, as well as the company as a whole. When problems occur, this may be reflected in absenteeism rates, labour relations issues and increased disability rates, benefits costs and turnover. In such situations, the expectation is that human resources can provide support and help. **AS@W is an accessible resource that is of practical value to employees, managers/supervisors, and unions who may be encountering a situation involving an employee with low mood or depression.**

Who would find AS@W of value?

There are a number of employees who may benefit from the availability of AS@W:

- New employees who are entering the organization and/or workforce and want to know about available resources and supports.
- Current staff that may be at risk for depression or low mood due to personal risk factors (e.g. having a baby, mental health issues among a loved one) or workplace risk factors (e.g. taking on a challenging new position).
- Workers who are exhibiting workplace behaviours or performance concerns that may be due to low mood or depression.
- Managers or employees who are seeking tools to help staff who may have a mental health concern.
- Employees who are returning to work after a depression-related absence.
- Individuals who are concerned about the mood and well-being of a colleague or loved one.
- Staff who have recovered from depression, but want to maintain good self-care in order to prevent or minimize relapse.



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

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How can human resources personnel use AS@W?

- Provide information about AS@W when 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.
- Information on the AS@W can be provided to the broad employee base through wellness or employee education sessions (e.g., lunch-and-learn sessions). This can serve to increase awareness and knowledge about mental health conditions, and to reduce stigma in the workplace. This can also serve to create and foster an environment where staff feels comfortable in seeking support for mental health concerns.
- When a manager or supervisor is having a performance concern with one of their staff, they frequently turn to human resources. Human resources personnel can be of assistance by being alert to the possibility that such concerns may reflect a mental health condition such as depression. In this case, human resources personnel can assist by advising and coaching the manager to introduce the AS@W to the employee in a supportive and appropriate manner, while respecting their privacy.
- Incidents such as accidents, interpersonal conflict or grievances may be the visible manifestation of an underlying mental health concern such as depression.** In the course of investigating and dealing with such events, it may be appropriate to inform relevant parties about the availability of AS@W. Similarly, human resources personnel are in a position to monitor organizational indicators such as benefits utilization or rates of absenteeism, turnover or disability as these may suggest a need to pay particular attention to employee mental health and provide reminders of AS@W.
- 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.
- Employees may inform human resources professionals that they are experiencing depression. While it is not their role to directly provide assessment or treatment services, **human resources personnel can be of value by informing the employee of AS@W, along with other relevant policies, benefits or programs.**
- AS@W can be used to assist with planning and implementing a successful work return.** This might include working with the manager/supervisor and employee to problem-solve how to deal with potential stressors that may be encountered during the return, determining appropriate accommodations and developing a joint plan to identify and manage possible relapse.



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Key considerations for human resources personnel

- The role of human resources personnel 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 or extended health plans.
- 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.
- Remain cognizant of psychological factors in the course of establishing and reviewing processes for selection, performance monitoring, staff development and job design.
- Monitor current and upcoming collective agreements (in unionized settings), as well as local and national human rights legislation as they pertain to persons with mental health disorders and disabilities.
- 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.
- Anyone within an organization may suffer from depression or low mood; in fact being the 'go to' person when difficulties arise can be an added risk. Human resources personnel 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

Goff, V. & Pittman, P. (2002). *Making the business case for improving mental health care: How to maximize corporate resources*. Washington, DC: National Health Care Purchasing Institute. Available at: <http://www.academyhealth.org/nhcpi/mentalhealth.pdf>

International Labour Organization. (2001) *Mental health and work: Impact, Issues and good practice*. Geneva: World Health Organization. Available at: http://www.who.int/mental_health/media/en/73.pdf



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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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