OCTOBER
SAFETY TALK

MENTAL HEALTH: WHAT ARE YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS A SUPERVISOR?

Mental health claims are being filed with WorkSafeBC in increasing numbers each year since they were first accepted in 2012.

In order for a mental health claim to be accepted by WorkSafeBC, the condition must be diagnosed by a psychiatrist or psychologist. The disorder must have happened at work, and been caused by work.

A mental disorder may be covered in either of the following circumstances:

- if it is a reaction to one or more traumatic events arising out of and in the course of employment, or
- if it is predominately caused by a significant work-related stressor, or a cumulative series of significant work-related stressors, arising out of and in the course of employment.

Claims caused by an employer's decision relating to employment are not accepted, including the following:

- A change in work or working conditions
- Discipline, including termination of employment
- Workload and deadlines
- Work evaluation and performance management
- Transfer, lay-off or demotion

That covers the mental health claims side of the equation. But we all know that mental health disorders are most often not caused at work, and no claim is made to identify the issue.

The OH&S Regulation requires that supervisors not assign work to anyone who has a reported or observed mental or physical impairment if that work could cause harm to the worker or anyone else.

Workers have a responsibility too: if physically or mentally impaired, they must advise their supervisor, and must not do work if that could cause harm to themselves or others.

Physical issues are usually easy to observe. But mental impairment isn't always so clear.

What does that mean to supervisors?

Supervisors are supposed to be able to identify changes in their workers' behaviour that could be an indication of a mental health issue. We all know that likely won't be possible in every case.

Therefore,

employers need to instil a "fellow worker" concept into the culture. If someone notices a co-workers behaviour has changed, then they need to speak to them about their state of mind, and if that isn't possible, they should alert the supervisor, confidentially.

This step could literally save a life.

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