

Mental illness affects everyone sooner or later — one in five people will experience a mental illness directly.



Those of us who do not have a mental health problem ourselves, will have a friend, colleague, or family member who is dealing with a mental health issue. And those of us who don't currently have a mental health issue, may move along the “mental health continuum” from poor mental health to good mental health, and back again, throughout our lives.



Workplaces are heavily impacted by mental health issues. “Mental health is a significant business issue that requires the attention of organizations. People who experience mental health issues face incredible challenges in the workplace. Many are misunderstood, shunned and underutilized,” said Karla Thorpe, Associate Director, Compensation and

Industrial Relations at the Conference Board of Canada. “In a world where shortages of critical skills are top of mind for many organizations, employers cannot afford to allow this situation to continue.”

A psychologically healthy and safe workplace has been defined as “*a workplace that promotes workers’ psychological well-being and actively works to prevent harm to worker psychological health, including negligent, reckless or intentional ways*”.

The implementation of a Psychological Health and Safety Management System is not about diagnosing the mental health issues of employees. It is about assessing how policies, processes and interactions in the workplace might impact the psychological health and safety of employees.

As an employer, manager, or supervisor, it is not your job or your responsibility to diagnose a mental health problem. However, being aware of the signs that suggest someone might be experiencing a mental illness is important.

Mental illness includes a broad range of symptoms and behaviours, and it is not easy to determine whether someone is mentally ill. One key indicator is that someone may begin to act uncharacteristically; an energetic person may seem lethargic for a considerable time, or a person who is usually mild may make grandiose claims about their abilities.

Behaviour changes such as these may reflect personal difficulties that may be resolved quickly. They may be signs that the person is no longer happy in their job. The individual might be going through a particularly stressful time in their life for any number of reasons. These behaviour changes might, however, indicate that the person is experiencing a mental health problem that goes beyond being “stressed-out” and that requires professional help.

Employers need to provide training for every level in their organization – managers, supervisors and workers. Training and resources are available through a partnership between the BCMSA and the Canadian Mental Health Association. See our website for more information:

www.bcmsa.ca/category/course-catalogue/

