Executive Summary - Workplace Mental Health Summit, Tuesday, May 6, 2014
PricewaterhouseCoopers – 300 Madison Avenue, New York, NY

The May 6th Workplace Mental Health Summit at PricewaterhouseCoopers brought together over 60 corporate and workplace mental health leaders, key stakeholders, including former US Representative Patrick Kennedy, health plans, and providers to engage in an open and dynamic discussion about how businesses manage and support mental health in the workplace.

Introduction to American Psychiatric Association

The summit began with a presentation by Dr. Paul Summergrad, President-Elect of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at Tufts University School of Medicine. Dr. Summergrad explained that the APA is eager to work with employers for the following reasons:

- Mental illness affects people during their prime working years
- Employers recognize the costs associated with untreated/under treated illnesses because of their productivity impact
- Employers are in a position to transform policy into practice because of their influence as big purchasers of health care
- Shared concerns about ineffective systems, access problems, lack of strong and consistent quality metrics, etc.
- Employers’ significant role in educating employees about health and ability to create a culture for help-seeking

Dr. Summergrad gave a brief overview of the tremendous burden of mental disorders in the US and highlighted recent research by Milliman and commissioned by the APA regarding the high costs associated with the treatment of people with comorbid psychiatric and physical illnesses. For example, a person with a treated psychiatric and/or substance use disorder typically costs 2-3 times more on average when accounting total medical costs than those without a behavioral condition in all market segments. These findings provide additional evidence supporting implementation of collaborative care models. You can download the report, Economic Impact of Integrated Medical-Behavioral Healthcare: Implications for Psychiatry, prepared by Milliman, Inc. here.

Importance of Psychiatry to the World of Work

Charles Lattarulo of American Express framed the discussion by emphasizing the need for better communication between corporate America and psychiatrists. In the past, forensic psychiatrists came to American Express to perform psychiatric evaluations, but the company no longer requires this. Dr. Lattarulo stated that psychiatrists should play a role in evaluating employees’ ability to work and also assess when an employee may be a danger to themselves and others. Once these individuals are identified and evaluated, employers and psychiatrists should work together to get employees the care they need so they can ultimately return to work. Currently, psychiatrists (and other providers) are not typically trained to assess an employee’s ability to function at work which impedes management of disability leaves and return to work decisions. Likewise, there is also very little training about mental health among corporate employers.

Dr. Lattarulo also discussed challenges employees face when accessing children’s mental health services. Parents often try to make an appointment when their child is already in crisis and then they are told that they will have to wait two months before they can see a psychiatrist for a first appointment.

Michele Martin from CBS explained that her company, like American Express, does not have psychiatrists conducting independent employee evaluations. However, CBS does require that employees on disability for mental health-related issues see a psychiatrist within 14 days of going on leave. CBS has seen positive results because of this policy. CBS believes that employees on leave for mental illness should not go back to work unless they feel stable enough to do so.
health. They learn strategies to help maintain good mental health. The manager version includes a full-day course (approximately 6 hours) that focuses both on their own mental health and the mental health of their employees. This course teaches effective communication strategies around mental health and illness and offers a module on accommodations and return-to-work.

Mr. Pietrus encouraged participants to use The Standard, a guide produced by the Mental Health Commission of Canada. This guide is intended to reduce psychological harm from conditions in the workplace and promote psychological help through support. The Standard is available at no-cost for the first five years. It is designed to be applicable to any organization and is intended to enable both employers and employees to measure progress.

#IWillListen Campaign Update

Barbara Ricci, NAMI-NYC Metro board president shared information about #IWillListen Day in Philadelphia. On June 3rd the city of Philadelphia came together to raise awareness and fight the stigma of mental illness at the nation’s first ever #IWillListen Day. The mayor of the city and other key stakeholders participated. The #IWillListen Philadelphia Day featured a mental health fair and ended with a concert in LOVE Park. Primary sponsors included: The Thomas Scattergood Behavioral Health Foundation, the Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disability Services (DBHIDS), and Friends Hospital.

The next meeting will be held on July 31st from 2-4:30 p.m. at CBS, 51 West 52nd Street between 5th and 6th. Any individuals interested on participating in the workgroup on standards, please contact Wendy Brennan at wbrennan@namincy.org or call 212.684.3365.