Executive Summary - Workplace Mental Health Summit
Tuesday, March 26, 2013 at Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited

The Workplace Mental Health Summit on March 26 at Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited brought together 40 corporate and workplace mental health leaders to engage in an open and dynamic discussion about how businesses manage mental health issues in the workplace.

Participants responded to a presentation by John Binns, a partner in the consulting practice at Deloitte UK. After a three month leave of absence due to major depression, Binns was welcomed back to Deloitte. Leadership support and open discussion enabled him to return to his full responsibilities quicker. Binns felt that if management’s reaction was negative, his recovery would have taken a different path. This inspired him to create the Mental Health Champions initiative.

After reflecting on his experience, Binns realized that he needed to build an open culture at Deloitte where people were comfortable talking about mental health issues. Companies should acknowledge that mental health issues impact productivity in the workplace.

The initiative appoints prominent and recognizable senior members of the firm to be ‘Champions’ for mental health who are known to the staff to confidentially discuss mental health and wellness. Though not medical professionals, the ‘Champions’ are trained to listen, help employees navigate the workplace, provide information about existing company programs and policies, and support in managing disclosure. Additionally, Binns established Fit for Success, a program that teaches managers how to manage their employees’ well-being as well as their own.

Objectives of the Mental Health Champions initiative include:
- Educating employees about the prevalence of mental illness;
- Recognizing that you’re not the only one and your career is not over;
- Learning about the availability of support and resources.

One major concern that arose during the discussion involved the issue of legality as it relates to liability and disclosure. For instance, would the disclosure to a ‘Champion’ be considered a notification about the employee’s disability under ADA? Could the disclosure result in potential litigation if the employee lost employment due to company layoffs after discussing his/her situation with a ‘Champion?’ The group concluded that there must be legislation to safe-harbor these types of approaches at both the local and federal level.

There was also discussion regarding the effectiveness of EAPs. While many businesses have EAPs, low penetration rates are often a result of not knowing how to successfully leverage these programs. There is also concern regarding the stigma associated with using mental health services. A few companies cited positive outcomes/greater utilization rates though rebranding an EAP in a more holistic way, which could include stress management, meditation, proactive outreach, and awareness events. Participants stated that incorporating wellness programs was a key factor in increasing EAP utilization.

The summit brought together key leaders with the power to influence and change the conversation about mental health issues in the workplace.

To do this, the following were identified as possible next steps:

1. Bringing key discussion points back to organizations and evaluating current practices;
2. Sharing of best practices that will ultimately be published by NAMI-NYC Metro, NEBGH and JWT;
3. Inviting one another into each other’s firms and raising awareness;
4. Establishing working group taskforces to drive the agenda forward, including addressing issues of legality.

The group consensus was to meet again; Deutsche Bank agreed to host the next summit. NAMI-NYC Metro and NEBGH will be contacting participants regarding the next meeting date in the near future.