Executive Summary - Workplace Mental Health Summit, Wednesday, October 2, 2013
American Express -- 200 Vesey Street, New York, NY

The October 2nd Workplace Mental Health Summit at American Express brought together nearly 40 corporate and workplace mental health leaders to engage in an open and dynamic discussion about how businesses manage and support mental health in the workplace.

Changing Hearts, Minds and Behavior: The Strategy Behind the UK’s Leading Mental Health Organization, Mind

The summit began with a presentation by Paul Farmer, Executive Director of Mind UK, the leading mental health charity in England and Wales.

Mr. Farmer explained that stigma is the most significant issue impacting workplace mental health. There is a deep silence and fear surrounding the issue, which leads to an environment where it is difficult for people to obtain information about mental illness. Mr. Farmer outlined the leading signs employees may exhibit when they experience mental health issues, such as loss of interest, mood changes, lack of confidence, and trouble sleeping. He stressed that it is crucial for managers to recognize these signs among their staff and address them in an effective and well-thought-out manner.

With work often being the most stressful factor in people’s lives, mental health is not an issue that corporations can ignore. In fact, in the UK, mental health problems are the leading cause of illness-related absence and cost the UK over 26 billion euros each year.

Mr. Farmer believes that, while most managers have good intentions and want to improve the mental health of their employees, they lack the training and guidance to effectively address the issue. Because of the lack of sufficient knowledge regarding mental illness, a third of people in the UK say that they would not be willing to work with someone who has a mental health problem.

In order to effectively address the issue, Mr. Farmer pointed out that, while different sectors may have different ways of addressing mental health, all corporations, no matter what the industry, should create an open and supportive working environment. Mind has created a three-pronged approach to encourage a mentally healthy work environment, which requires senior leadership across the organization to:

- Promote wellbeing by making mental health a crucial part of a workplace agenda, supporting flexible working conditions where possible, ensuring clear communication, establishing trust, and promoting peer-support as well as physical and social activities.
- Tackle work-related causes of mental health issues by holding regular one-on-one meetings with staff, providing coaching and on-the-job support, and publicizing internal and external support resources.
- Support employees with mental health problems by making workplace accommodations, creating a culture which allows for disclosure and providing support for individuals when needed.

A question was asked about how Mind and corporations connect. Mr. Farmer explained that his organization usually connects with corporate HR directors who reach out to him. At other times, it is employees at workplaces who directly get in touch with Mind. In order to maximize impact, Mr. Farmer said, collaborations between Mind and corporations should be made at the Board level.

Mr. Farmer ended with a brief overview of his organization’s anti-stigma campaign called “Time to Change.” Launched in 2007, the campaign is England’s biggest program to challenge mental health stigma and discrimination and remove the fear that prevents people from talking about mental health. Having gained the support of celebrities and famous politicians across the UK, “Time to Change” has already reached millions.

One Voice Primary Care Initiative: Integrating Depression Screening into Primary Care Practices

Following Mr. Farmer’s presentation, Laurel Pickering, President & CEO of the Northeast Business Group on Health (NEBGH) discussed her organization’s One Voice initiative, a program which links mental health support to primary care
practices (PCPs). Health plan performance data show a very low identification of patients with a depression diagnosis; however, the amount of money that employers spend on anti-depressants is quite high. It turns out that 80% of these prescriptions are written in primary care, so NEBGH wanted to identify exactly what is going on with PCPs and their treatment protocol for addressing patients’ mental health. Ms. Pickering went on to explain that PCPs lack the knowledge to effectively treat depression – something that most physicians whom NEBGH contacted were willing to admit. They also lack the relationships with mental health professionals required to make referrals for patients with mental health-related problems.

NEBGH created a multi-stakeholder taskforce and partnered with the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) to showcase the effectiveness of the collaborative care model. This model integrates depression screening and management into primary care, and, as Ms. Pickering stated: “If we can make it here in New York City, the land of for-profit, national health plans and smaller physician practices, then we can make it anywhere.”

The collaborative care model, which links mental health professionals with primary care practices, has had positive impacts on treatment outcomes. NEBGH’s pilot aims to enroll 1,000 patients in an effort to demonstrate to the health plans that this is worth the investment. So far, One Voice has connected with Emblem and Value Options, Montefiore Care Management Organization and the Manhattan’s Physician Group. The initiative is currently working through reimbursement issues with Cigna, Anthem (Empire), United, and Aetna.

Ms. Pickering ended her presentation by urging participants to contact their insurance providers to encourage the use of the collaborative care model. “As customers of plans, you are the voice – you can help to move this forward and set an expectation of seeing progress.” She advised the workgroup to call up their plans and ask about the progress they have made with the One Voice initiative – explaining that mental health is just as important as physical health and is crucial to the productivity of an organization.

A Mental Health Program Tailored to an Organization’s Culture: ICU Mental Health at DuPont

Science and engineering giant DuPont reported that it has developed a program called ICU Mental Health (ICU is short for Identify. Connect. Understand) which aims to change the way mental health is viewed in the workplace. Paul Heck, Global Manager of Employee Assistance and Work/Life Services, spoke to the group about this innovative model, which encourages employees to reach out to coworkers who appear to be in emotional distress; offer their help; and understand a way forward together. DuPont’s culture recognizes that as long as corporations involve people, attention must be paid to the emotional environment in which they work. DuPont created a short video on ICU which has been shown to hundreds of thousands of employees at DuPont’s locations throughout the world. This program serves as a model, to demonstrate to corporations that an organization’s mental health program must be tailored to the culture of the organization, in order to effectively address and manage mental health in the workplace.

NAMI-NYC’s National Anti-Stigma Campaign: “I Will Listen”

NAMI-NYC’s new anti-stigma campaign “I Will Listen” was launched on the morning of the Summit, October 2. Drew Train, Business Director at JWT Ethos, spoke about the momentum of the campaign, citing the hundreds of videos already collected, the user-friendly nature of the site, and the article published that morning in the business section of the New York Times. “I Will Listen” has already been picked up by over 300 media outlets and is gaining followers to its Facebook and Twitter pages each day. As part of the “I Will Listen” campaign, Mike Thompson and Barbara Ricci’s PSAs are being run throughout the entire month of October (Mental Health Awareness month) on CBS in the NYC metro area.

NAMI-NYC Metro is eager to continue engaging leaders in the business community about this campaign. Deutsche Bank discussed its “I Will Listen” Day, which is being held on October 7th in the lobby of its Wall Street office in order to engage senior level executives to participate in this important conversation and keep the momentum going.

The group consensus was to meet again. Martha Velasquez, Global Human Resource Program Manager at JWT, offered to host the next summit at JWT. NAMI-NYC Metro and NEBGH will contact participants regarding the next meeting date soon.