

## HEALTH MANAGEMENT INSIGHTS

# Psychiatric cases

'Psychiatric': relating to mental illness and its treatment.

A 'psychiatric disorder' is a mental illness that can greatly disturb a person's thinking, moods and/or behaviour - but there is a very wide spectrum of severity of mental ill health.

Depression and anxiety disorders are the most common mental illnesses and can present with symptoms such as low mood, impaired concentration and sleep, feelings of panic.

Mental ill-health is very common in the workplace and contributes significantly not only to days lost through absence but also the financial cost of presenteeism to a business. It has been estimated that addressing wellbeing at work increases productivity by as much as **12%**.

Mental illnesses are more likely to develop during times of stress or uncertainty, which can be related to work or non work related issues.

Equality legislation may apply to mental health illness and requires an employer to look at reasonable adjustments to support their employee at work. Simple strategies can make a big difference when supporting employees with mental health issues at work.

## Mental illness may be grouped into 7 categories - but can often co-exist:

- > Mood disorders (such as depression or bipolar disorder)
- > Anxiety disorders
- > Personality disorders
- > Psychotic disorders (such as schizophrenia)
- > Eating disorders
- > Trauma-related disorders (such as post-traumatic stress disorder)
- > Substance abuse disorders

Presenting features can vary widely, and can include more severe symptoms such as self harm, suicidal thoughts, hallucinations and delusions (hearing, seeing or believing things that others do not).



Depending on the type and severity of their illness, a person might be under the care of their GP or a specialist team in mental health services.

## How can an employer help?

- > Recognise that stigma still exists around mental ill health. Try to create a culture in the workplace that supports staff to open up about their mental health and makes clear what support can be offered. This should be supported by a health and wellbeing policy.
- > Consider training for managers to ensure that they can recognise signs of the range of mental ill health/psychiatric disorders since not all employees will disclose a history or recognise symptoms themselves.
- > While not specialist mental health professionals, occupational health professionals have a wealth of experience in dealing with these health issues within the workplace, and can undertake an individual assessment of your employee and subsequently provide you and your employee with bespoke recommendations. For some complex cases, we may wish to liaise directly with the specialist involved.
- > Depending on the nature of the job and the condition you may need to consider restrictions for your employee at work, for example, it would not be advisable for a person who has impaired concentration to undertake safety critical duties, or work with dangerous machinery or driving. A health and safety risk assessment can help you identify what restrictions may be necessary/ appropriate but consider referring such cases to occupational health for specialist advice.





- > Simple adjustments can often help an employee manage their mental ill health alongside their work, for example, flexible or changed hours or start /finish times, regular breaks, a phased return after long term absence, supporting their attendance at medical appointments if they fall ill during their working hours, mentor/buddy systems, working from home arrangements, etc.
- > While not a mental health condition in itself, prolonged stress can lead to anxiety and depression - and can also potentially exacerbate other underlying mental health issues. In addition, employers have a duty to protect their staff from stress at work.
- > A stress risk assessment is a useful tool to explore sources of stress for your employees. The HSE's Management Standards can be a useful reference- these standards help identify and manage six areas of work design which can affect stress levels – demands, control, support, relationships, role and change.
- > Consider encouraging employees to contact Access to Work Mental Health Support Service, which is a confidential service delivered by Remploy and funded by the Department for Work and Pensions. It is available at no charge to any employee with depression, anxiety, stress or other mental health issues affecting their work.

## Further sources of information

- [Mental health](#)
- [MIND](#)
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- [Mental health](#)
- [HSE](#)