



THE CHARLES E. KUBLY FOUNDATION
A Public Charity Devoted to Improving the Lives of Those Affected by Depression.

Advancing Suicide
Prevention®

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TREMENDOUS TOLL ON STATE'S PRODUCTIVITY

REDUCING ECONOMIC BURDEN OF DEPRESSION IN WISCONSIN WORKPLACE

Wisconsin Lt. Governor, Milwaukee foundation partner to engage state's employers in better addressing significant economic burden of depression on Wisconsin's economic viability and outlook

MILWAUKEE, WIS. – January 24, 2007 – A unique and robust partnership to address the significant economic burden of depression in the Wisconsin workplace was announced today by the Charles E. Kubly Foundation of Milwaukee. This partnership engages Wisconsin Lt. Gov. Barbara Lawton, Johns Hopkins workplace researcher Alan Langlieb, MD, and *Employee Benefits News*, the nation's leading trade publication for benefits managers, to consider what Wisconsin employers can do to strengthen the state's workforce and its productivity.

This month a *Special Report for Wisconsin Businesses* will be mailed to 5000 state leaders in corporations, insurance, health care, government and public policy. This report, "**Sustaining Productivity: Addressing the Economic Burden of Workplace Depression**," is being disseminated as a supplement to a special issue of *Advancing Suicide Prevention*, a national health policy magazine. This issue focuses on male populations at greatest risk for suicide, and contributing factors including undiagnosed and untreated depression and substance-use disorders. The initiative is funded by the Charles E. Kubly Foundation, a Milwaukee-based public charity committed to improving the lives of those affected by depression.

“As Wisconsin employers seek better ways to maximize workforce productivity and company-sponsored health benefits, considering the role of depression is critical,” says Denise Pazur, senior editor for the *Sustaining Productivity* supplement. “That’s because depression, if left untreated or undertreated, can lead to failed projects and faulty products, absenteeism and employee turnover, diminished on-the-job safety, flawed decision making, poor morale and lack of teamwork. The drain on productivity is significant, to say the least.”

Nationally 225 million workdays are lost annually to productivity decline related to depression, according to recent research; this is more work loss and impairment than that from diabetes, asthma, arthritis and other chronic conditions, notes Pazur.

Moreover, employers are in a unique – and powerful – role to positively impact workplace depression, say experts, by improving the design, delivery, purchase and implementation of behavioral health benefits they fund. What’s more, employers who proactively address depression in their employees have seen real financial return on that investment. These include medium-size employer Highsmith, Inc. of Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, which has seen health premiums and employee turnover at rates significantly lower than state or national averages; the Highsmith story is profiled in the *Sustaining Productivity* supplement.

Also featured is an “**Employer Call to Action**” with eight key actions that Wisconsin business and policy leaders can take to better address the economic and emotional burden of depression in the workplace; these include employers aggressively:

- 1) **AUDITING FOR PREVALENCE** of behavioral health conditions in their covered populations, percentage treated, and where treatment occurs.
- 2) **REQUIRING EVIDENCE-BASED PROTOCOLS** that demonstrate superior outcomes in depression treatment.
- 3) **ACTIVELY MANAGING** the supply side by using comparative measures to assess provider performance, and push providers to report their performance publicly. (Note that among the 50 states, 21 have mandatory quality reporting requirements for health care providers; Wisconsin is not among these.)
- 4) **EVALUATING BEFORE ENDORSING** vendor programs for depression.
- 5) **MANDATING BETTER COORDINATION** between general medical and specialty behavioral health services to enhance quality and accountability.
- 6) **CATALYZING A CULTURE SHIFT** in the workplace to ensure that confidentiality is upheld, barriers to treatment are minimal, and negative repercussions are absent.
- 7) **PROMOTING PROACTIVITY** through use of anonymous and evidence-based screening in susceptible employee populations and initiating treatment sooner to contain direct and associated costs.
- 8) **ENSURING PROVIDER COMPENSATION** so that primary care physicians are being reimbursed to screen for depression.

“Wisconsin employers are uniquely positioned to improve the productivity of their workforce, and ultimately their own bottom line and the economic outlook for our state,” says Wisconsin Lt. Gov. Barbara Lawton. “As major purchasers of health care coverage, employers are de facto health policymakers. They can drive quality and accountability performance with the decisions they make as collective consumers. And their influence bears the weight of responsibility for the health and wellbeing of Wisconsin families, the workplace and our state economy.”

EDITOR’S NOTE: To arrange an interview with Wisconsin Lt. Gov. Barbara Lawton; Johns Hopkins Workplace Researcher Alan Langlieb, MD; Ronald Finch, EdD, Vice President of the Washington, DC-based National Business Group on Health; *Sustaining Productivity* editorial staff; or Kubly Foundation Executive Director Sally Kubly, MSW, contact Denise Pazur at 920-207-8747 or dpazur@advancingosp.org.

To download a pdf file of “***Sustaining Productivity: Addressing the Economic Burden of Workplace Depression,***” A Special Report for Wisconsin Businesses, visit www.charlesekublyfoundation.org.

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