

Supervisor NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
June 2018

The Workplace Opioid Addiction Crisis

By Jaime Carter-Seibert, MA LMHC

When we think of opioid addiction, emaciated addicts shooting heroin in alleys may come to mind. But according to the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM), surprisingly it's working adults who make up the majority in the surging opiate epidemic, addicted by way of a doctor's prescription.

Pain medications such as hydrocodone, oxycodone, vicodin, dilaudid, and morphine, are having a devastating impact on people who fall under its addictive spell, and one in three opioid prescriptions are being abused.

Studies from the National Institute on Drug Abuse and Castlight Health, found a staggering two million Americans are abusing prescription opioids. What may have started as an honest attempt at pain management has escalated for many into a health crisis impacting not only their lives, but also costing their employers billions—\$10 billion to be precise, according to ASAM. This economic blow stems not only from absenteeism, but also “presenteeism” with poor productivity, mistakes, and workplace accidents. On top of this, employers are paying nearly twice as much in healthcare for opiate-abusing employees than they do for non-abusing ones.

This can be a daunting situation in the workplace, but as a supervisor you can offer employees a hand out of this addiction abyss and here's how:

Recognize the Signs of Opioid Addiction

Use Symptoms

PHYSICAL:

Marked drowsiness, confused or disoriented, constricted pupils, dramatic mood shifts, social withdrawal

ON THE JOB:

Declining productivity and performance, frequent absences, prolonged lunch hours and breaks, work accidents, carelessness with safety, poor memory

Withdrawal Symptoms

FLU-LIKE SYMPTOMS:

Nausea, muscle aches, runny nose, abdominal cramping, and excessive sweating

OTHER SYMPTOMS:

Sleeplessness, anxiety, high blood pressure, dilated pupils, blurry vision

Consult Your HR Manager

He or she will understand your company's policy on a Drug & Alcohol-Free Workplace, and can guide how to address the problem and assist the employee while ensuring workplace safety. Both Reasonable Suspicion and Random Drug-Testing policies will likely come in to play. It will also be important to know if prescription opioids are included in your drug screening panel, and if not, to consider adding them.

Call Your EAP

Free professional consultation is available for managing concerns with your employees and protecting your company from liability. We can help you formulate next steps for retaining your employees as they are addressing their addiction. And we are also here to speak with your employees directly to offer support, guidance, and treatment resources.

<http://www.seattlemag.com/article/pain-point-taking-opioid-addiction-problem-seriously>

<http://www.castlighthealth.com/typ/the-opioid-crisis/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/11/health/prescription-painkillers-seen-as-a-gateway-to-heroin.html>

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