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SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER (SUD): UNDERSTANDING THE CONDITION

Businesses wishing to retain employees are looking for modern solutions to substance use, recognizing that substances, whether prescribed or illicit, can affect employees at the worksite. Today's recovery friendly approach involves strategies to acknowledge, manage and support employees that use substances. Both businesses and employees benefit when the focus is on recovery.

SUD: A MEDICAL CONDITION

Strictly speaking, SUD is a medical condition. In 1987, the American Medical Association officially designated "addiction" as a disease and since then society, the healthcare profession, treatment and recovery organizations, and employers just like you have been struggling to understand and deal with its impact on the workplace.

Substance(s) involved in substance use disorder may be legal or illegal. Opioids and other prescription medications are drugs. So are alcohol, marijuana and nicotine.



SUD changes normal desires and priorities. It interferes with the ability to work, go to school, and to have good relationships with friends and family. It does NOT affect people based on their socioeconomic bracket, gender, age, or race. It is an equal-opportunity problem.

Equally important, it is incredibly widespread.

The National Survey on Drug Use & Health (2018) reports that more than 21 million people in the U.S. are affected by SUD. Many of them go to work each day.



Most importantly, SUD is treatable. For example, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (2020) reports that the relapse rate for drug addiction is as low as 40% when a person in recovery engages in medication-assisted treatment.

Recovery is possible. And the workplace can play a huge role in making it possible.





SUD CAUSES & FACTORS

The exact cause(s) of substance use disorder are not known, but experts have pinpointed 3 areas of risk:

Family history. A person's SUD issues can often be linked to family history.

Environmental factors. This includes family life, school, peer pressure and exposure to addictive substances.

Developmental factors. Research has indicated strongly that when drug use begins early in life (prior to age 18), there is a greater likelihood it will become a SUD.

OTHER FACTORS.

- On-the-job injuries
- Emotional hardship
- Depression
- Stress
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Low self esteem

THE IMPACT OF THE OPIOID CRISIS ON SUD

Nationally, the epidemic of opioid misuse is a well-covered topic and in Connecticut, we've experienced our own share of suffering. Communities, families and individual lives have been shattered - and our economy has been impacted as well.

- Opioid-related deaths continue to top 1200/year.

- The advent of fentanyl has increased deadly overdoses.
- The loss of the state's prime-age labor force has slowed economic growth by 50%.
- Employers in all industry sectors are affected.
- Estimates are that we've lost 300 million work hours since 1999.

Nearly 75% of American adults with an opioid use disorder are in the workforce (NSC 2017). This is why the problem needs to be addressed in the workplace.



WORKPLACE INJURIES

Sometimes SUD is the cause of workplace injuries, other times it is the result of a workplace injury.

Injuries sustained at work sometimes result in the use of prescription painkillers while the worker recovers physically. However, over reliance on prescription pain relievers can result in SUD for the worker - especially if the employee returns to work too soon.

It's also worth mentioning that not all workplace injuries are reported to the employer. Some are reported to the



insurance provider and remain unknown to managers and supervisors.

Be alert to workers who are experiencing pain on the job. It may be an indicator of SUD, or a contributing factor.

ABSENTEEISM AND PRESENTEEISM

The first term we all know. In the present context it refers to lost workdays due to substance use. In fact, the CT Department of Labor estimates that we've lost 300 million work hours since 1999 due to opioids and other prescription drugs.

“Presenteeism” is a relatively new term.

It refers to workers who are physically on the job, but are so distracted by the damage that SUD is causing in their lives – personally, or from family members and other loved ones suffering from SUD – that they are ineffective at work.

The point: SUD hurts businesses in many ways.

