



# *Mental Illness is Common, Undertreated and Costly to Productivity*

## WHAT EMPLOYERS NEED TO KNOW – IN ONE SLIDE

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August, 2014

In July, the Silicon Valley Leadership Group (SVLG) invited me to introduce a panel at their 2014 "[Workplace Wellness Summit](#)." Sponsors of the Summit included IBI Stakeholder members such as Johnson & Johnson and Kaiser Permanente. The panel was titled "The Impact of Mental Health Issues on Your Workforce and How to Mitigate the Effects of Stress, Depression, and Caregiving Issues" and featured speakers from Google, Union Bank, and Caring.com.

The slideshow in its entirety is included at the end of this document. But my introductory message was summarized in one sentence:

**Mental illness is common, undertreated and costly to productivity.**

To drive that point home in a single slide, IBI pulled a few simple statistics from its [HPO-Select](#)<sup>1</sup> and [Health and Productivity Benchmarking](#)<sup>2</sup> databases. We showed the productivity impact of two mental health disorders - depression and anxiety - alongside results for diabetes. We chose diabetes as a comparison precisely because it has well-known disabling and even life-threatening complications.

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<sup>1</sup> < <http://ibiweb.org/tools/hpq-select> >

<sup>2</sup> < <http://ibiweb.org/tools/benchmarking/> >

## Mental Illness is Common, Undertreated and Costly to Productivity

	Depression	Anxiety	Diabetes
% of Employees with condition	14%	13%	4%
% Never treated for condition	23%	31%	3%
Average number of other chronic illnesses (out of 25)	5.0	4.8	4.5
Annual sick days (compared to people without condition)	4.7	3.0	2.8
Annual presenteeism days (compared to people without condition)	12.2	12.0	1.7
% of Non-pregnancy STD days	5.4%	2.1%	0.6%
% of LTD payments	4.5%	0.7%	1.5%

Sources: IBI *HPQ-Select* data, ≈ 120,000 employees from 64 companies; IBI *Health and Productivity Benchmarking* data, >2.2 million claims from ≈ 41,000 employer disability policies



Viewed in this context, the seriousness of mental illness to the quality of employees' lives and the impact on employers' bottom lines becomes clear. For every employee with diabetes, there are three employees with either depression or anxiety. And whereas almost all employees with diabetes have been treated for it at some point in their lives, about one in every four employees with depression and one in every three employees with anxiety has never been treated. From a caregiving perspective, employees with depression or anxiety face hurdles that may be as complex as employees with diabetes: in each case, employees are struggling with between four and five other chronic health conditions.

As dangerous as diabetes is, mental illness has a greater impact on employers' bottom lines. Compared to healthier peers, employees with anxiety miss at least as many workdays as employees with diabetes (an average of about three days per year more than their peers without anxiety), and employees with depression miss even more work (an average of about 4.7 days more than their peers). When it comes to presenteeism – the cumulative impact on productivity when employees are unable to perform at their usual level due to illness symptoms or treatment side effects – the comparison is not even close. When expressed as equivalent lost work days, employees with mental illness have six times the productivity losses as employees with diabetes.

Mental illness is also costly when it comes to major productivity disruptions. There are over 10,000 unique diagnoses recorded in our database of disability claims. Yet depression and anxiety diagnoses alone account for almost 8% of all short-term disability (STD) lost work days and more than 5% of long-term disability (LTD) payments. The disability impact of diabetes is a fraction of these losses.

How much of these productivity results are driven by the patterns of undertreatment remains an open question. All the same, this handful of basic statistics underscores a straightforward message that employers would be wise to heed:

Mental illness is common, undertreated and costly to productivity.