Opioid Abuse Meeting Kit



Opioid dependency is on the rise in the United States, whether it is prescription medications or illegal substances such as heroin. Companies and safety managers can combat substance abuse in the workplace with an Employee Assistance Program targeting both alcohol and drug dependency on the job.

WHAT ARE OPIOIDS?

The term “opioids” refers to prescription medications used to relieve pain as well as illegal drugs such as heroin. Opioids are highly addictive. In New Hampshire, and across the United States, there is an opioid addiction crisis. This crisis includes heroin, street fentanyl, other illicit opioids, and the misuse of prescription drugs.

The repercussions of this crisis are many, including overdose deaths, self-neglect and neglect of loved ones, child and elder abuse, newborns experiencing withdrawal, unemployment, homelessness, and health effects such as HIV, Hepatitis C, liver damage and heart problems.

4 MAIN ISSUES

The four main issues arising with drug and alcohol abuse in the workplace are:

- Premature death/fatal accidents
- Injuries/accident rates
- Absenteeism/extra sick leave
- Loss of production

OPIOID ABUSE: EAP PRESCRIPTION

Rather than firing an employee after drug or alcohol use is discovered, an EAP with alcohol and drug treatment pays for itself mainly with a reduction in healthcare costs, according to National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence.

OPIOID ABUSE EFFECTS

The side effects of opioid abuse are fairly varied and may include:

- Drowsiness
- Lethargy
- Paranoia
- Respiratory depression

Imagine how opioid abuse and the side effects it brings could have negative effects on the work of those who suffer from addiction. Not only is the person who is under the influence of the drugs at an increased risk for injury or death while at work, but everyone around the worker is as well.

ADDICTION ISSUES

Substance use is often thought of as an addiction or dependence, but use can be anywhere on the spectrum or scale from recreational to frequent to problematic. As a result, there are varying impacts on lives and work. **The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health use the following "4 C's" to describe addiction:**

- **craving**
- loss of **control** of amount or frequency of use
- **compulsion** to use
- use despite **consequences**

ELEMENTS OF WORK THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE USE OF SUBSTANCES

Various and numerous organizational, personal and social factors can play a major role why a person may choose to use a substance. In general, however, some work-related factors can include:

- high stress,
- high demand/low control situations,
- low job satisfaction,
- long hours or irregular shifts,
- fatigue,
- repetitious duties,
- periods of inactivity or boredom,
- isolation,
- lack of opportunity for promotion,
- lack of, remote, or irregular supervision and,re
- easy access to substances.

RESOURCES TO HELP EMPLOYEES

Here are some ways to help your employees manage pain:

- **Fight the stigma.** Let employees know that they can confidentially seek treatment without jeopardizing their jobs.
- **Take advantage of the EAP.** An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) offers counseling, information and support for all types of issues. It's especially useful for managers to help with unfamiliar situations such as opioid misuse in the workplace.
- **Educate employees.** Let your employees know the risks of opioids. Help educate them about other options for managing pain: occupational therapy, physical therapy, behavioral health treatment, acupuncture and massage.
- **Draft a written policy.** Your company's legal department can assist with drafting a policy that addresses the use of prescribed opioids as well as

the risks of opioid misuse in the workplace to help ensure employees are safe and healthy.
- **Conduct supervisor training.** Managers also need proper education and training about the resources available to help an employee who may be experiencing a personal or family problem involving opioids.

FINAL WORD

If you suspect a coworker is suffering from an addiction problem speak with a supervisor. Opioid abuse is not just their problem when it carries over into the workplace. The side effects these drugs bring with their use can create dangerous situations where many people could be injured or killed on the job.