



PATIENTS FOR JOBS; BIZ PLAN TARGETS MENTAL HEALTH

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MENTAL HEALTH issues in the workplace are costing the country \$33 billion annually in lost production and need to be addressed by Corporate Canada, a conference heard yesterday.

"(It) is an urgent challenge," Dr. Remi Quirion, director of mental **health** and **addiction** at McGill University told the Global Business and Economic **Roundtable** on **Addiction** and Mental Health, a mix of Canada's business and scientific communities.

A 10-year plan to combat the problem will be implemented in June but businesses need to help govern it, said Dr. John Frank, of the Canadian Institute for Health Research.

"The workplace has two options -- to exacerbate the problem or mitigate the problem," Frank said.

Mental health issues are a huge problem for corporations, said Rick Brunet, senior vice-president for the Manulife Group.

"Forty per cent of our disabilities are related to mental health and it's a big cost. I'm supportive of any applied research (to help)," Brunet said.

The coalition plans to study more than 50,000 workers and compare the cost of treating depression to the lost revenue as a result of the disease.

Only one in five Canadians who need mental health care actually receive it, Statistics Canada says.

Depressed people miss on average 24 more work days a year than healthy people, said Dr. Ron Kessler, of the medical school at Harvard University. "If you invest money to find depressed people and (take) them into therapy, they will show up for work and you can get 100% return on the investment," Kessler said.

People between the ages of 15-24 are uniquely vulnerable as are women, who are twice as likely to suffer from depression than men, said Dr. Miriam Stewart, with the CIHR.

"We assume it has something to do with the sex hormones (and) estrogen, and that's going to be important how we treat it. The (intervention) programs need to be gender sensitive," she said.

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