

Helping a Depressed Colleague

In 2010, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration estimated that by 2020 behavioral health disorders, which include depression, will surpass all physical diseases as a major cause of disability worldwide. In 2014, an estimated 15.7 million adults aged 18 or older in the United States had at least one major depressive episode in the past year. This number represented 6.7 percent of all U.S. adults (National Institute of Mental Health). According to the World Health Organization, 35 to 50 percent of mental health disorder patients in high income countries did not seek help ("Prevalence, Severity and Unmet Need for Treatment of Mental Disorders", World Health Organization World Mental Health Surveys, June 2004, *Journal of the American Medical Association*).

How do dental professionals fare when it comes to mental health disorders and seeking help? According to the 2015 ADA Dentist Health and Wellness Survey, a total of 11 percent were diagnosed with depression, 6 percent received a diagnosis of anxiety disorder and 4 percent were identified as suffering panic attacks. Twenty-eight percent of dentists sought help for their mental health disorder, while 44 percent strongly agreed or agreed that it was difficult for them to seek help because they believe they can solve their own problems.

Friends, and often colleagues, are the first line of defense in the fight against depression. By understanding the signs and symptoms of depression, friends, and often colleagues can become the first line of defense in the fight against depression. You may notice the problem in a depressed colleague before s/he does, and your concern can motivate your colleague to seek help.

Signs and symptoms of depression include:

- Doesn't seem to care about anything anymore
- Is uncharacteristically sad, irritable, short-tempered, critical or moody
- Has lost interest in work, hobbies and other pleasurable activities
- Talks about feeling "helpless" or "hopeless"
- Expresses a negative outlook on life
- Frequently complains of aches and pains, such as headaches, stomach problems and back pain
- Complains of feeling tired and drained all of the time
- Has withdrawn from friends, family and other social activities
- Sleeps less than usual or oversleeps
- Eats more or less than usual, and has recently gained or lost weight
- Has become indecisive, forgetful or disorganized
- Drinks more or abuses drugs, including prescription medications

Source: www.helpguide.org/articles/depression/helping-a-depressed-person.htm

Seeking Help

The best way to support a colleague dealing with depression is to encourage them to seek help. This task can often be difficult due to depression disabling motivation and energy and enabling negative thoughts or ways of thinking. These obstacles can prohibit your colleague from admitting there is a problem or helping them see that the problem can be solved.

If your colleague is resistant to getting help for depression:

- Suggest a general check-up with a family doctor. If a physician diagnoses depression, s/he can refer your colleague to a psychiatrist or psychologist
- Offer help in locating a doctor or therapist
- Encourage the person to make a thorough list of symptoms to discuss with the doctor

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