

HEAL BREAKFAST ON THE HILL

GREEN PAPER

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It is my pleasure to have the opportunity to discuss mental health issues in the health work place. Let me begin by saying that mental health, mental illness, mental disorders, behavioural health and addictions have never been so clearly on the radar screens of Canadians. We see ample evidence of this in the media and through discussions with colleagues, family, and friends.

A few milestones:

1. Mr Romanow declared mental health the orphan of Medicare.
2. Senators Kirby, Keon, LeBreton and colleagues on the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology are about to release the most extensive report on mental health in Canadian history.
3. All parties in the last Parliament supported Minister Fletcher's motion on mental health.
4. Currently very serious consideration is being given to the implementation of a Canadian mental health commission.

HEAL's Green Paper on health human resources fits nicely into this broader mental health context. It clearly identifies the importance of mental health factors in the workplace as they relate directly to health human resources. We know from years of research that healthy workplaces far outperform unhealthy ones.

Some points to consider:

1. Many Canadians spend more time at work and travelling to and from work than they do with their families. I'm sure that is not true for us in this room.

2. Mental health issues from work deeply affect non work relationships and visa versa. There is a dynamic work/life interaction.
3. Positive work environments are more productive and creative and have higher levels of quality and efficiency.
4. Canadians are more likely to stay with employers who appreciate and accommodate them than with those who do not. This is a very significant human resource recruitment and retention issue in the current health labour shortages environment in health care in North America.
5. Flexibility in the health workplace that better accommodates work/life and career lifecycle demands and choices supports effective recruitment and retention while encouraging increases in productivity, innovation, and quality. The discussion of the career lifecycle is one of the strengths of the HEAL Green Paper.
6. One of the most serious issues for the mental health of the health work force is the work load. Chronic overwork has significant negative impact on the individual and on their work. This is well known and yet there is little relief in sight due to Canada's chronic health work force shortages.

A survey of psychologists in public and private practice in Canada in 2000, found that factors such as work hours flexibility, unnecessary bureaucracy and heavy work loads are central issues facing the publicly funded health sector work force.

Mental health issues are fundamental to the workplace. They contribute to effective recruitment, retention, quality, safety, productivity, and innovation on the positive side and they are clearly implicated in absenteeism, presenteeism, benefits utilization, retention difficulties, quality problems, and low productivity.

The HEAL Green Paper speaks to these issues. On behalf of the Canadian Psychological Association, of which I am the Executive Director, and the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health, of which I am the Chair, I highly recommend the HEAL paper and thank you for your time.