

MENTAL WELLNESS

A generation ago, we talked in whispers when a colleague went off work on “stress leave”. Today, we realize that wellness encompasses mental, physical, social, financial, spiritual, environmental, and vocational health. Commonly referred as “dimensions”, they are interdependent and influence each other, and when one dimension of a person’s well-being is out of balance, the other dimensions are affected.

Our focus is on ‘mental wellness’ in this Journal, which includes all aspects of mental health, emotional state and well-being, such as anxiety, mood, depression, stress management, self-care, suicide prevention, as well as how they interact. Mental wellness influences how we think, feel, and behave in our daily lives.

TELUS Health (formerly LifeWorks) has published their Mental Health Index (June 2025) with some interesting comparisons to the 2021 Index we highlighted in the October 2022 Journal.

- Despite heightened mental health awareness, stigma persists; self-stigma has declined by only three per cent while fear of workplace stigma has increased by one per cent since February 2021
- One-third of workers feel anxious, three in 10 feel isolated and do not have emergency savings to cover basic needs, and more than one-quarter feel depressed and say their mental health is adversely impacting work productivity
- 33 per cent of workers have a high mental health risk, 44 per cent have a moderate mental health risk, and 23 per cent have a low mental health risk
- 45 per cent of workers would be concerned about career options if they had a mental health issue and their workplace was aware; younger workers disproportionately experience higher self-stigma and concern
- For the second consecutive period, finances are the leading source of personal stress; nearly three-quarters of workers lack confidence in their financial future, with women more likely to feel financially vulnerable

Insurers are taking action

TELUS Health has identified the issue that over 50% of people leaders feel unprepared to address mental health issues in the workplace. Insurers are increasingly taking action; mental wellness is a growing area of focus for group insurance plans, often addressed as part of the Employee and Family Assistance Plans (EFAPs). A comprehensive EFAP can help to maintain the wellbeing, health and therefore, job performance of each employee.

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There are several strategies that employees are encouraged to use to enhance their mental wellness, including:

- ☛ Practice mindfulness: the mental state achieved by focusing your awareness on the present moment, instead of mentally rehashing the past or imagining the future.
- ☛ Use relaxation and self-care strategies that work for you.
- ☛ Seek support from family, friends, community, and/or a professional.
- ☛ Exercise regularly, eat well, and get enough sleep.
- ☛ Express feelings and emotions effectively, and practice positive self-talk.

Internet-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (iCBT)

Most EFAP providers offer iCBT tools and programs to their clients as part of their EFAPs. The benefits of iCBTs are many, not the least being that iCBTs are less expensive than in-person talk therapy (one-third of the cost), and iCBTs make it easier for employees to access and schedule than in-person talk therapy.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a form of psychological treatment that has been demonstrated to be effective for a range of problems including depression, anxiety disorders, alcohol and drug use problems, marital problems, eating disorders, and severe mental illness. Numerous research studies suggest that CBT leads to significant improvement in functioning and quality of life. In many studies, CBT has been demonstrated to be as effective as, or more effective than, other forms of psychological therapy or psychiatric medications.

CBT treatment usually involves efforts to change thinking patterns. These strategies might include:

- ☛ Learning to recognize one's distortions in thinking that are creating problems, and then to re-evaluate them in light of reality.

- ☛ Gaining a better understanding of the behavior and motivation of others.
- ☛ Using problem-solving skills to cope with difficult situations.
- ☛ Learning to develop a greater sense of confidence in one's own abilities.

CBT treatment also usually involves efforts to change behavioural patterns. These strategies might include:

- ☛ Facing one's fears instead of avoiding them.
- ☛ Using role playing to prepare for potentially problematic interactions with others.
- ☛ Learning to calm one's mind and relax one's body.

Not all CBT will use all these strategies. Rather, the psychologist and patient/client work together, in a collaborative fashion, to develop an understanding of the problem and to develop a treatment strategy.

CBT places an emphasis on helping individuals learn to be their own therapists. Through exercises in the session as well as "homework" exercises outside of sessions, patients/clients are helped to develop coping skills, whereby they can learn to change their own thinking, problematic emotions, and behaviour.

CBT therapists emphasize what is going on in the person's current life, rather than what has led up to their difficulties. A certain amount of information about one's history is needed, but the focus is primarily on moving forward in time to develop more effective ways of coping with life.

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