

**GLOBAL BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC ROUNDTABLE
ON ADDICTION AND MENTAL HEALTH**

The Roundtable is affiliated with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

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Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health
to the
Industrial Accident Prevention Association of Ontario
Annual Conference
April 4, 2001**

***EMOTIONAL WORK HAZARDS DOMINATE
NEW ERA OF OFFICE AND PLANT SAFETY***

*Information Age Depression Replaces Historical Industrial
Risks To Worker Health As Leading Cause of Disability*

Toronto, Ontario – (April 4, 2001) Recent front page headlines have put depression on the map as a mainstream news story.

Stories that Canadians are seeing their doctor about this invasive disorder in record numbers reflects the status it now has as an enemy to public health in this country.

That being so, it is important to add this dimension to those findings. The modern work place is the greatest source of stress in the lives of Canadians, stress is a trigger of depression and this one disorder represents the most powerful source of worker disability in Canada and the world today.

Further, the dollar and broader economic costs of depression are paid for mostly through business specifically and employers generally. A smaller percentage of the cost of this widespread disorder is covered by public health insurance.

Depression is also widely non-discriminatory. It is an affliction of leaders and everyday people alike. It is business and public health enemy number one.

Soft Lumber: “Petty Change Compared To Depression Costs”

The facts are well-documented:

- Depression and other stress-related mental health disorders are robbing our places of work -- and the people in them -- of huge tracts of productivity and impairing the sustainable economic performance of Canadian companies.
- Notably, compared to the business and economic (dollar) cost of depression, the financial stakes involved in the current, high-profile softwood lumber dispute between the United States and Canada is small change.
- The price tag of depression is about \$60 billion (U.S.) a year in North America. Two-thirds in economic and business loss and one-third in the direct costs of diagnosis and treatment. But depression has little or no economic profile.
- At stake in the softwood lumber dispute is a marketplace e4stimated to be (in the US) \$10 billion (Cdn) – one-sixth the North American “depression cost market” – and a stake of \$4 billion a year to the American producers. The issue has huge diplomatic and political profile. Compared to depression, it is “small change” economically.
- In the automotive sector, the “thought content” of cars and trucks coming off the assembly line – in the form of innovative computer-based design, safety and operational features – have greater dollar and commercial value than the steel and plastic housing the vehicles.
- Corporations today spend more on telecommunications interconnecting the words and thoughts of people than they do on oil, the blood of machines.

Replaced Historical Threats

Depression – combined with addictions and anxiety disorders – has replaced the historical threats to worker health associated with air quality, unsafe plant sites and dangerous manufacturing practices.

Meanwhile, ergonomics – an important health science – is nonetheless a kind of “feint hope clause” in terms of advancing the overall standards of employee health on a large scale – yet it has spawned a virtual industry of academics and consultants.

In raising our guard against depression, I am not suggesting we lower it against these more traditional health issues. It is a matter of shifting priorities.

Aggravated Mental Health

I am saying, though, that society's preoccupation with physical health risks is a necessary but incomplete – even obsolete – perspective in this era of aggravated public mental health.

At the same time, the promotion of mental health is a very real expression of traditional accident prevention values. Most of us are not intentionally trying to drive each other crazy at work. We do it by accident.

This is a critical point. Mental health accidents and emotionally unsafe work environments involve many of the same “preventatives” needed to protect the physical health of our employees and co-workers. In both cases, we must change attitudes and behaviors alike.

Management Practices Key

Management and business practices are at the heart of protecting and promoting the mental health of the labor force.

We suggest that on the grounds of enlightened self-interest, business leaders must tackle the mental health crisis afflicting our places of work and the economy as a whole. The IAPA can play a definitive role. The issues shake out along the following lines:

- One, the workers compensation system must be modernized. Ten to twenty per cent of the Canadian population suffers depression. That number goes to nearly 40 per cent when we reference anxiety disorders. This renders the eligibility rules of WCBs as inadequate and obsolete for purposes of compensating employees for the effects of the most common form of disability in the working population today.
- Two, management practices which promote the mental health of the labor force are key to ridding the information work place of emotional work hazards. Appropriate practices must be devised, standardized, taught and infused into the work place as the most powerful tool at our disposal to reduce the current heavy incidence of stress-related disorders.

- Three, emotional work hazards are a familiar family. They include a range of everyday work place behaviors including the unfair distribution of work, sudden and unexplained changes in company priorities, lack of control over daily tasks, arbitrary management styles, unclear job expectations, office politics, “blame” cultures and perpetuated uncertainty on the job.
- Four, the work place itself must be equipped and promoted as the most accessible venue for the earlier detection and better treatment of depression. Current detection rates are a national disgrace.
- Five, business must set financial targets as incentives to fight stress-related and depressive disorders at work. Savings in the order of ten to twenty thousand dollars per employee, per year is a conservative target.
- Six, the excessive use of electronic messaging and E-mails specifically must be regulated. The Roundtable pleads with supervisors, managers and executives to effect E-mail ceasefires across Canada in some combination— on casual Fridays or at specific times during the workday. Protocols are urgently called for.

Leadership Needed

In advocating an IAPA leadership role, the Roundtable extends its hand of partnership and support. Your mission can be profitably expanded to target emotional safety hazards now proliferating in work spaces and places everywhere.

Millions of Canadians are hurried, worried and rattled by change -- and by the sheer intensity of their lives in this information age.

The 24-hour, seven-day work week may be more perception than reality. But that perception is taking a huge toll on the peace-of-mind of a significant percentage of working Canadians.

Top Sources of Stress

For example, among the top ten sources of work place stress (Roundtable, 2000), the unyielding sensation of having too much to do – all at once, all the time – is driving workers in this country closer to diagnosable stress-related and depressive disorders.

Aside from its present status as the leading source of disability in Canada, and the world -- inside 20 years, if current trends persist – unipolar depression along with ischemic heart disease will become the leading causes of workdays lost through disability and premature death.

Canadians In Prime Afflicted Mostly

Depression is linked to heart disease in other ways. It heightens the risk of sudden death five times among heart attack victims. Business knows a lot about this famous disease but very little about equally consequential medical issues associated with the human mind.

The growing number of Canadians consulting their physicians about depression is instructive for business. These are people in the prime of their lives. In the prime of their working lives.

Economy of Mental Health

In the months ahead, the Roundtable will expand to Western and Atlantic Canada, the United States and Europe. The formation of our Global Corporate and Labor Advisory Committee on Mental Health is well underway.

In 2002, we propose to stage a Global Business and Economic Summit in Toronto to review new standards of leadership and management needed in this global market place to confront, and turn back the pandemic of addictive and mental disorders.

It seems to me, the basic point is this.

With the advent of the 21st century, we have entered the economy of mental and behavioral performance. Just as sure as the world entered the industrial age at the dawn of the 20th. It is logical to adjust our thinking about employee health and safety accordingly.

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