

Working during depression can offer health benefits to employees

10 September 2014, by Liz Banks-Anderson



(Medical Xpress)—Attending work while suffering a depressive illness could help employees better manage their depression more than taking a sickness absence from work, a new study has found.

The collaborative study between the University Of Melbourne and the Menzies Research Institute at the University of Tasmania is the first to estimate the long-term costs and health outcomes of [depression](#)-related absence as compared to individuals who continue to work among employees with depression in Australia.

Lead researcher Dr Fiona Cocker from the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health said a greater understanding of the costs and consequences of both absenteeism and presenteeism would allow for more informed recommendations to be made to the benefit of employees and their employers.

"We found that continuing to work while experiencing a [depressive illness](#) may offer employees certain health benefits, while depression-related absence from work offers no significant improvement in employee [health outcomes](#) or quality of life," she said.

"Cost associated with depression-related absence and attending work while depressed were also found to be higher for white collar workers who also reported poorer quality of life than blue collar workers."

Researchers calculated the costs based on lost productivity, expenses associated with medication and use of health services and the cost of replacing an employee who is absent from work and unwell.

"This is important information for employers, [health care professionals](#) (e.g. GPs) and [employees](#) faced with the decision whether to continue working or take a [sickness absence](#). It suggests that future workplace mental health promotions strategies should include mental health policies that focus on promoting continued work attendance via offering flexible work-time and modification of tasks or working environment," she said.

Workplace programs and modifications may also have positive, long-term effects on health and well-being via the maintenance of a daily routine and co-worker support.

Finally, the exploration of these outcomes in blue and white collar workers allows work attendance recommendations to be tailored to specific occupation types.

These methods also have the potential to be adapted to other health conditions where work attendance behaviour is affected, such as diabetes or heart disease.

Provided by University of Melbourne

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