

CATEGORY:

HEALTH POLICY

MANAGING WORK PERFORMANCE

SUBMITTED BY

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Health care providers encounter a combination of difficult problems. Managers, human resources personnel and employees are faced with particular problems unique to them. Downsizing, rapid organizational change, economic constraints, occupational exposures and the constant dealing with death and dying are but a few concerns that health care is faced with every work day. At the same time, managers and employees are pressured to provide optimum patient care and to be accountable for the quality of care provided.

Health care employees spend as much time at work as they do at home. When a personal problem arises, the impact can cause work performance to deteriorate. Addictions, financial crisis, relationship issues, family problems, illness, critical incidents, mental health and work place problems are but a few issues that can impact work performance and create havoc at work and at home. Managers must always be aware of decreased productivity signals which include absenteeism and poor work habits.

Managers, human resources personnel and union representatives alike demonstrate support for best practices to assist troubled employees when work performance declines. Establishing a Management Initiated Referral (MIR) process as a legally safe best practice to assist managers deal with declining work performance, can produce very positive results. A health care organization, in addition to saving money by retaining a valued employee, also demonstrates that it cares for the employee's personal well being.

MANAGING WORK PERFORMANCE INCLUDES:

- MANAGING work performance and observing that there is a problem is the initial step in the WORK PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PROCESS. If the first declining work occurrence is mild, the problem can easily correct itself simply by making the employee aware of work performance issues and providing the opportunity to improve.
- RECORDING poor work performance accurately is critical to the success of the Management Initiated Referral process. Managers are encouraged to share positive and negative work performance issues and present them to the employee respectfully at the first meeting. Dates, times, events and witnesses are essential evidence that can help protect the manager.
- The PROCESS involves a constructive team interview between manager, employee, union and human resource representatives in a private setting. It is helpful also, when managers have been trained with proper interview techniques, to use appropriate attending and listening skills. If at any time during the interview process personal issues are shared, managers must deal with work performance concerns only and not get involved in employee personal problems. Managers are always encouraged to provide support in a caring and empathetic manner.

If the work occurrence is severe and warrants discipline through human resources, a Management Initiated Referral to the organization's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is established. The employee should be aware that accepting an offer of assistance to the EAP will not exempt him/her from being disciplined. Upon return to the work place, work performance will continue to be monitored so that it is maintained at an acceptable level. It is extremely important also that, whatever

the discipline imposed, the disciplinary action must be followed through. A Management Initiated Referral flow chart outlining the steps to follow can assist managers and human resource personnel to stay on track when monitoring work performance issues.

An ASSESSMENT of presenting work performance issues and a copy of the letter outlining work performance concerns shared by human resources personnel to the EAP professional is initiated. Often employees are resistant to this assessment process but express gratitude to their organization when professional assistance is provided and especially when outcomes are positive. Employees need to be informed that the Employee Assistance Program is a CONFIDENTIAL helping process and the professional is trained to assist them not only with work performance issues but any personal issue that is shared during the assessment phase. Information disclosed between employee and EAP professional will remain in confidence and can only be shared to others with informed and written consent from the employee. A plan of action to deal with presenting issues is agreed upon between employee and EAP professional.

Following the assessment, the employee is matched and referred to appropriate counselors with the right level of expertise to assist them with presenting issues. The focus is on short term intervention, at no cost to the employee, and counselors utilized are qualified external treatment providers in the community.

With informed consent from the employee, the EAP professional will consult with the assigned counselor, the manager and human resources personnel when appropriate. Permission is granted also to share with the manager and human resources, if the employee accepts or refuses the offer of assistance, as well as time loss from work to attend counseling or treatment facilities.

Close contact and monitoring of progress will be maintained with the employee while counseling is ongoing and any concerns arising will be followed up immediately. A summary of counseling progress to date and recommendations to assist the health care organization with the return to work plan of the employee is often requested.

A RETURN TO WORK AGREEMENT is beneficial in assisting the health care organization and prepares the employee for return into the workplace. A team meeting outlining expectations on the job should occur and the return to work conditions must be agreed upon and signed by all participants. Some conditions of the agreement such as urine surveillance for alcohol and drugs and counseling compliance will be monitored through the EAP. Research indicates that return to work agreements provide clear expectations of job performance and helps retain a valued employee. Once the employee returns to work, the manager and EAP professional can work together to assist with continuance of the PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PROCESS.

Included are orientation of new and existing workplace policies, providing a mentor to assist an employee while at work and offering flexible work schedules to accommodate counseling and EAP appointments. This process will achieve success when the manager keeps abreast of the return to work agreement and continuously manages and evaluates work performance to ensure it is always maintained appropriately. The EAP will provide managers and human resources with return to work compliance/non compliance results as well as provide counselor reports and recommendations as agreed upon during the return to work meeting.

Best practices for managing work performance are based on managers observing behaviour affecting

work performance and providing a rapid response. To be successful, a team approach is recommended and following clear process guidelines is imperative. Once the employee begins receiving professional assistance, time will tell if the process will work and it does take time and continued supervision and support to get performance at an acceptable level.

Following established management-initiated referral guidelines will lead to a successful outcome for all involved in the process and will help avoid the pitfall of legal implications.

REFERENCES:

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