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How ADHD Affects the Workplace

What is Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder?

- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurobiological psychiatric disorder that manifests in a persistent pattern of inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity. These symptoms are present since childhood and occur at a higher frequency than those of the same age group.
- ADHD not only affects children and adolescents, but also persist into adulthood and can affect work performance, social relationships, as well as personal safety and can lead to costly public health problems.
- Research strongly suggests that ADHD tends to run in families with twin studies revealing that nearly 80 percent of the influence of ADHD is due to genetic factors.

How Many People are Affected by ADHD?

- Approximately 4.4 million or 7.8 percent of school-age children in the U.S. have ADHD.
- An estimated 9 million or 4.4 percent of U.S. adults have ADHD.
- Up to 80 percent of children with ADHD continue to have the disorder as adolescents and 65 percent have the disorder as adults.

What are Common Symptoms of ADHD in Adults?

- Adults with ADHD often struggle with symptoms of inattention and can experience organizational challenges because of a lack of structure in their lives. This inattention also places additional stress on relationships.
- These adults generally have outbursts of energy and are attracted to highly stimulated environments; however, this constant activity may lead to extreme family tension.
- Adults with ADHD can have difficulty controlling impulsive behavior, talk excessively and react inappropriately in social and professional settings. Additionally, they are easily distracted and are more likely to be involved in accidents and driving collisions.
- Adults with ADHD can have a low tolerance for frustration and because of their symptoms of impulsivity, they can have unpredictable tempers.

What is the Impact of Untreated ADHD?

- Adults with untreated ADHD are more likely to experience lower educational achievement and are less likely to graduate from high school or college. They are inclined to have low self-esteem, anti-social thoughts, a pessimistic outlook on their future and problems with their romantic relationships and jobs. Furthermore, adults with untreated ADHD are twice as likely to be divorced or separated.
- Untreated ADHD can lead to increased stress, depression and poor mental or physical health. Additionally, adults who do not treat the disorder are likely to engage in harmful behaviors, such as smoking, using recreational drugs and unlawful conduct. These adults are also at risk for frequent personal injuries and are four times more likely to be involved in a motor vehicle accident.

What are Common Signs of ADHD in Adults in the Workplace?

- Adults with untreated ADHD can have difficulty staying engaged in reading, meetings or while going through paperwork. Additionally, they may rapidly switch between projects because they have difficulty starting or finishing assignments. Because they cannot focus and complete projects, adults with untreated ADHD are viewed as inefficient and low performing.

- Adults with untreated ADHD often have poor time management skills and are disorganized, which can lead to over scheduling and feelings of being overwhelmed.
- However, adults with ADHD are usually very creative and perform well in interactive jobs.

What is the Impact of Untreated ADHD in the Workplace?

- Adults with untreated ADHD have difficulty managing large workloads, keeping organized and concentrating on work and are; therefore, less likely to be currently employed. Those who are employed are less likely to express complete satisfaction with their professional life and career track.
- Among adults with ADHD who currently are employed and have had more than one job in the past 10 years, 43 percent report leaving one or more jobs because of their ADHD symptoms.
- The average loss of household income per adult with ADHD ranged from \$8,900 to \$15,400 per year, compared to adults without ADHD, which amounts to \$77 billion lost each year in the U.S. economy.

How is ADHD Treated?

- The first-line treatment for ADHD is stimulant medications, with long-acting and once-daily medication remaining the gold standard of medical therapy.
- Medical treatment can be combined with educational approaches and psychological and behavioral therapies, which are effective in teaching individuals with ADHD coping methods to help them maneuver through common challenges in professional and social settings.
- The following coping techniques, used in conjunction with medical treatment are useful in helping individuals overcome their ADHD and reach their potential:
 - Maintain consistent structure and predictability in daily activities to compensate for challenges in inattention, impulsivity and distractibility.
 - Participate in activities and pursue professions that play to strengths, rather than exacerbate weaknesses.
 - Begin seeking treatment and counseling as soon as impairments are recognized.
 - Commit to educating family and friends about the symptoms of ADHD and how the disorder affects everyday activities and relationships to develop an environment of understanding and acceptance.

Where Can I Find More Information about ADHD?

- It is important to learn about ADHD if you suspect that you or someone you know may have the disorder. There are many helpful Web sites, such as www.ADHDsupport.com, which provide information on the symptoms, diagnosis and treatment of ADHD.
- For more information on ADHD and related mental health topics, visit www.mhai.org or contact the Mental Health America of Illinois' (MHA) information and resource line at (312) 368-9070 ext. 10.
- If you think you may have ADHD, speak with your physician for a professional evaluation. Additionally, you may visit www.nmha.org to learn of support group meetings in your area and begin connecting with others who have ADHD.