

Healthy workforce, healthy society:
Introducing *Not Myself Today*

Introduction

Mental health is everyone's business. We're all affected by it. In the workplace, the cost of doing nothing is staggering, both personally and economically.

Jobs and careers are an important part of our lives. Along with providing a source of income, they help us fulfill our personal aims, build social networks, and serve our professions or communities. They contribute to the development of a healthy European population. However, the pace and nature of work is changing, and jobs are steadily becoming a major source of emotional strain.

The challenge

A growing body of evidence shows that a number of workplace mental health issues like job stress, work-life conflict, harassment, and violence exert a human toll, lead to significant social costs and impede productivity. Prolonged job-related stress, for example, can drastically affect physical health. Constant preoccupation with job responsibilities often leads to erratic eating habits and not enough exercise, resulting in weight problems, high blood pressure, and elevated cholesterol levels. It can cause burnout that can lead to depression, which, in turn, has been linked to a variety of other health concerns such as heart disease and stroke, obesity and eating disorders, diabetes, and some forms of cancer. Chronic depression also reduces immunity to other types of illnesses, and can even contribute to premature death.

Depression in the workplace is a leading cause of lost work productivity, sick leave and early retirement. Consider the following European Union statistics:

- Depression in the workplace is a leading cause of lost work productivity, sick leave and early retirement; some key findings indicate that one in ten working people have taken time off work because of depression, and around 350 million working days are lost in the EU each year due to stress and depression;
- Mental disorders are highly prevalent in Europe and impose a major burden on individuals, society and the economy. They represent 22% of the EU's total burden of disability;

The overall financial costs of mental disorders, including direct, as well as indirect, medical costs through care and lost productivity, amount to more than €450 billion per year in the EU.

Stigma also accounts for a big part of the problem. The misunderstanding that surrounds mental health problems or illness contributes to preconceived notions, misperceptions and fears. Employees facing mental health challenges often choose to suffer in silence and/or avoid getting help rather than face the stigma and discrimination.

The opportunity

The workplace culture, including good psychosocial management practices contribute considerably to the organization's success. It has been observed that a positive workplace culture significantly improves the sense of wellness and overall satisfaction among employees; betters service quality and subsequent client satisfaction; and strengthens the company's brand awareness and reputation in the community.

Mental health and well-being of the workforce is a key resource for productivity and innovation in Europe, and a critical asset for companies. There is no doubt that a wide variety of working conditions are powerful determinants of health, for better or for worse. Businesses can make a major contribution to the wellbeing of society, and thus play an important role, not only as employers, but also as advocates for health in society.

Among the many European initiatives to address this area, the European Commission formed the European Pact on Mental Health and Well Being. A number of other recommendations have also been developed to incorporate sound employee health management initiatives at the workplace, including the introduction of health and wellness programmes into corporate strategies.

The Role of the European Brain Council

Healthy workforce is a cross-cutting issue that can be identified in all the three pillars on which EBC is basing its mission – i) drive education and awareness, ii) promote prevention and treatment, and iii) stimulate innovation.

EBC is strongly convinced that mental health and well-being of the workforce is a key resource for productivity and innovation in the EU. Furthermore, employment not only involves focusing on *more* jobs, but also on *better* jobs; therefore, key existing recommendations should be consolidated and tangible preventive measures need to be developed in order to improve the overall wellbeing of the workforce. This should be done in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including employers and employee organisations, to be implemented in human resources policies within the workplace.

To this end, EBC has been involved in a number of initiatives to address healthy workforce.

In 2015, EBC organized a Year of the Brain concluding multi-stakeholder conference titled 'Lifting the Dark Clouds: What can Europe do to Reduce the Burden of Depression in the Workplace', where key representatives of patient organisations, European Union institutions, academia and pharmaceutical industry discussed a number of possible solutions to address this topic.

EBC is a member of multiple initiatives with mental health as their core focus, including the European Pact on Mental Health and Well Being, Joint Action on Mental Health and Wellbeing, European Business Leadership Forum to Target the Impact of Depression in the Workplace, the Experts Platform on Depression, and OSHA's 2014-2015 'Healthy Workplaces Manage Stress' and 2016-2017 'Healthy Workplaces for all Ages' campaigns.

In 2016, EBC will continue to build on its previous experience in the field of promoting healthy workplace and will begin the development and formation of a dedicated campaign on mental health in the workplace.

The Initiative

In alignment with EBC's background in mental health and the conviction that awareness is vital, a new initiative will be taken on, entitled *Not Myself Today*.

EBC believes a strong opportunity exists to reach deeper into the "silent majority" suffering from the burdens of mental health disease in the workplace and broaden the reach of mental health education. We do not claim to have started the conversation on mental health in the workplace, however, we do want to strengthen it, and make all employees feel safe and comfortable in their environment, specifically when it comes to sparking conversation.



Not Myself Today was introduced to workplaces in Canada in 2013 to encourage employers and employees to transform mental health at work, and will now be piloted, and if successful, rolled out across Europe. In the past three years, the campaign has informed, engaged, recruited, mobilized and partnered with people and organisations to successful and meaningful change in the improvement of mental health. Through this initiative, European companies and organizations will receive comprehensive resources and tools to organize events and activities that engage employees and aims to reduce stigma and create cultures of acceptance and support for mental health and for those who are facing mental illness.

Using the toolkit, European employers will continue the success it has had in North America. Through customizable activities, best practice guides, conversation guides and content, facts and resources for both employers and employees, and engaging support materials, *Not Myself Today* works **for** the employees and gets them excited and proactive for the creation and maintenance of a mentally healthy workplace.

It is vital to have the voices of leading companies and organizations, policymakers and community leaders spread awareness of a campaign that helps employees and employers better understand mental health, reduce stigma and foster a safe, open and supportive workplace environment.

Through your support and your pledge to the initiative, you invest in the health and wellbeing of your employees, reduce the economic burdens of lost work productivity, and support the European Brain Council in its commitment to working together to advance the creation of more mentally healthy workplaces, and transform and improve mental health supports, services, policies and systems.

