

Work stress costs SA R40bn

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October 10, 2016



Chronic stress can reduce productivity and affect our well-being. File picture: Siphwe Sibeko

By IOL Reporter 🕒 Oct 10, 2016

Johannesburg - Work-related stress and major depression, burnout and anxiety disorders are costing SA's economy an estimated R40.6 billion a year - equivalent to 2.2 percent of gross domestic product.

This is according to Dr Renata Schoeman, board member of the Psychiatry Management Group (PsychMG), who was commenting ahead of World Mental Health Day on Monday.

Schoeman urges companies to realise the significance their company structure, expectations of employees and management style have, not only on the company's annual turn-over and overall productivity, but in the risk of employees developing health problems that could prevent them temporarily or permanently reentering the workforce.

“Companies should play a leading role in alleviating and eradicating possible stressors at work. They should foster a healthy educational environment with pro-active mental health awareness programmes, stress management training, access to services which nurture help-seeking behaviour, implement a coaching or counselling programme, identify people in need of care and offer them resources to ensure they receive proper treatment.”

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She says that burnout, the condition of being emotionally and physically exhausted, is a direct result of work circumstances and conditions.

“Burnout leads to feelings of failure, being worn-out, poor performance and reduced personal accomplishments. The condition is a direct result of unclear job expectations, poor job fit, dysfunctional workplace dynamics, lack of control and a work-life imbalance.

“Employees at risk face, if left untreated, hospitalisation for cardiovascular and mental health disorders, ischaemic heart disease, substance abuse, suicide, anxiety, depression and insomnia amongst other. These are serious consequences for a company’s overall turn-over, success and above all, detrimental to the employee’s overall well-being and healthy state of mind.”

Schoeman says that employees have a duty to ensure a healthy lifestyle that includes adequate sleep, daily exercise, embracing an attitude of life-long learning, follow a healthy eating plan, and limit the use of alcohol, increase social activity and being more mindful.

“Mental health awareness in the work place will ensure early identification and treatment of disorders, prevent recurrence and long-term complications. By implementing employee assistance programmes, the quality of life of employees and the longevity of the company will see a lesser loss to the country’s gross domestic product and prevent disorders turning into permanent disability.”

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Adapted from a press release.