



Top 10 Tips: Making the Opioid Epidemic Your Business in the Workplace

Opioid addiction is our nation's leading public health crisis, affecting people across all socioeconomic classes, races, genders, and occupations. An injury is often the first in a series of events that can lead a person down the path of opioid addiction. Some industries have more on-the-job injuries than others, and employers in these fields can help prevent misuse of opioids and offer help when workers are struggling with addiction. Here are 10 tips for organizations to address the opioid crisis:

CHASING ZERO 
every overdose is preventable

1

Provide an employee assistance program (EAP) benefit

– EAPs can be a great resource for employees seeking low-barrier help to deal with personal issues, such as concerns about their drug use. EAPs offer counseling and provide brief screening, assessment, and referrals to treatment providers. Most EAPs also dovetail with a drug-free workplace to provide your supervisors with training, a rapid response to drug and alcohol problems, and case monitoring and management.

2

Provide some paid time off following a workplace injury and create a culture of health and job security

– Unfortunately, in many industries, it is the norm to work through pain and get back to work as quickly as possible after an injury. In many industries, an injury means rushing to the emergency department or urgent care clinic to get prescription pain medications and then quickly return back to work. By providing for a reasonable amount of time off following an injury and promoting the use of this available time off, you will be sending a message that you care about the health of your people and no one needs to fear for the loss of their jobs if they get injured or sick. The return-on-investment is undeniable. You may save a life.

3

Ensure your workers' compensation insurer has developed protocols to catch suspicious opioid use

– Many workers' compensation insurers have made significant changes to the way they manage injuries and the use of opioid painkillers. Just a few short years ago, these

insurers promoted themselves based on how quickly they returned injured workers to work. Their success was often made possible by prescription opioid painkillers. It doesn't hurt to ask your insurer a few pointed and critically important questions.

4

Train your supervisors to monitor and measure performance objectively

– How you monitor and measure performance or productivity is up to you, and it reflects your organizational culture and values. That said, supervisors may need training to monitor and measure without bias. This is especially true when there is a reasonable reason to believe drugs or alcohol are part of the problem. The supervisor's job is not to moralize, diagnose, or address the personal reasons for declining performance. Their job is to set expectations, monitor performance, measure it, and manage it. If performance falters, they document what they see objectively and then reinforce expectations with employees.

5

Promote your EAP proactively

– If you have an EAP, remind ALL employees that the EAP is there as a benefit to help anyone who might have a concern or problem they want to discuss with a professional. Don't make use of or mention the EAP only in instances of positive drug screens or serious performance problems. Doing so renders the EAP into a punitive experience. Rather, promote it liberally among everyone before problems surface in the workplace. Encouraging the use of services like an EAP is a great way to promote health and wellness for the body and mind.



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You can help prevent misuse of opioids and offer help when workers are struggling with addiction

6

Adopt a drug-free workplace policy offering people a chance at recovery

– Some well-intentioned companies try to have a zero tolerance policy when it comes to drug use. Unfortunately, firing everyone who uses, misuses, or abuses drugs can be very problematic and expensive. Many employers choose instead to offer employees a second chance at their job. Whether they test positive for cause, under reasonable suspicion, or on a random screen, employees are offered professional help, stringent monitoring, and the opportunity to turn their work and lives around through recovery. You win, too! This employee is more likely to return loyal and hard-working, and you will retain his/her knowledge and relationships with customers.

7

Develop a return-to-work policy allowing people in recovery back to work

– Most people really do need to take time off work, seek medical treatments, and heal. Whether they suffered a physical injury or underwent treatment for an opioid use disorder (OUD), bringing people back to work as soon as its medically reasonable is much better for everyone. Refer to your human resources provisions to learn more about your return-to-work policies and procedures.

8

Make light-duty assignments available to people while they recover from injuries

– Again, whether they suffered a physical injury or treatment for an OUD, get people back to work once they are stable. However, you very likely will need to arrange for some light-duty assignments at first. In some sectors like farming, mining, fisheries, lumber, manufacturing, and construction, you will need to develop a list of light-duty assignments with your human resources

professional and ensure that your supervisors are aware of light-duty assignment protocols. Being at work, with peers, contributing in a light-duty way is a real win-win!

9

Make education available to everyone in every format possible

– Let's face it, our country is dealing with an opioid epidemic because there was a lot we did not know or understand about opioids. Many assumed they were safe because the manufacturers said so. Few questioned the physicians when they wrote prescriptions. Old prescriptions were kept in bathroom cabinets, which put our own kids at risk. No one really knew that you could get addicted to opioids in a matter of five days! We need to educate our staff about the risks of taking opioids. And there are many ways to contribute to this education effort. Commit to raising awareness through training and education. Use presentations, webinars, podcasts, print, and video as your educational tools. Share the information widely with your leadership team, your employees, and their family members.

10

Make naloxone part of your first-aid kit

– Naloxone, sold under brand names like NARCAN®, reverses opioid overdose easily, quickly, and safely. Training is available in its administration, and in some states, it is sold at a significant discount or is provided free of charge to reduce harm and save lives. Add naloxone to your first-aid kit and who knows? Perhaps you will save a life someday.

Embrace your role as a smart workplace in pursuit of zero overdoses.