Health apps assist at-risk workers

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(NPN) - One in four people will have a diagnosable mental illness in any given year, and half during the course of their lifetimes.

Whether it's anxiety, depression, or some other mood disorder, it's costing people on an individual basis, and on the job, where productivity slides when mental health suffers.

Companies are doing something to help employees, and their bottom lines, by offering something called telemental health options.

Stress, anxiety or even depression can come from a hectic work environment or toxic workplace, other times, it's just balancing work with life.

Either way, the cost to companies impacted by the issue can be massive.

Paul Gionfriddo, President of Mental Health America, sees hope on the horizon for employers and employees with something called telemental health.

"It can be much more effective at identifying people early and, uh, getting them into services, care, supports, and treatment at a time when they can most easily recover," Gionfriddo said.

Telemental health includes mobile apps like Ginger, Castlight, or Talkspace. The apps don't diagnose mental illness, but can detect a pattern or risk, then connect you to the help you need.

This is good news for companies who see stress manifest itself in absenteeism, lower productivity, disability and more. Now, more and more companies are making sure employees are aware of the online options.

Eric Lucas is founder of the Oxygen Plan, which helps deliver a stress number to those using the app, then deliver ways to lower that number.

He said there's no need for employees to stress, thanks to privacy laws. The bosses aren't given details on individual employees, just a bigger picture.

"With stress number, companies for the first time can get an aggregate look at their employee base," Lucas said.

Mental health proponents think that feedback is important.

"What that aggregate information can also tell us is whether or not workplaces have what some people call toxic stress in them," Gionfriddo said.

And Gionfriddo stresses you don't have to go through your work to use most of these apps.

"These apps give people the opportunity to self-monitor, to get connected to people like them, and to get referrals to the kinds of services and supports that they need and are looking for," Gionfriddo said.

According to Gionfriddo, research so far has shown the apps are as effective or comparably effective as face-to-face contact with a clinician, and in addition to that, it's either about the same cost or less exp to use those apps.

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