



## Importance of Employer Support of Mental Health

BY LISA LOWERY DEAL PHARM.D., FASHP, BCACP, B.S.N.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT for patients at SUN Behavioral Delaware is the number one priority for our patients and as a mental health organization SUN strives to ensure the staff is supported as well.

Research shows that nearly 70% of adults in the workplace experience a manifestation of stress and/or anxiety.<sup>1</sup> It has also been shown that mental health disorders like depression and anxiety are often co-occurring with other chronic diseases like diabetes and hypertension.<sup>2</sup> Mental health disorders can lead to poor communication, decreases in productivity and overall decrease in employee engagement.

“Because we are treating anxiety, depression, schizophrenia and other mental health disorders every day, our staff and providers are much more likely to discuss personal issues and seek treatment than other health care providers in a non-mental health space,” says Ann Wayne, CEO of SUN Behavioral Delaware.

Erin Willis, Business Development Director at SUN Behavioral Delaware relayed that “by increasing our social media presence and encouraging discussions regarding mental health throughout the community, SUN Delaware’s aim is to decrease the stigma regarding mental health and increase healthy behaviors for preventing and coping with stress and other mental health disorders.”

Workplace health promotion can have significant benefits for both employers and employees. By encouraging open discussions related to stressors at work and elsewhere, staff can develop an open dialogue to promote healthy support systems.

SUN Behavioral has an active employee engagement committee that provides an open forum for staff to discuss concerns. Meeting once a month, staff develop key programs to increase employee engagement and develop relationships between all staff members. SUN also has a robust Employee Assistance Program (EAP) which can provide confidential assessments and treatment for work related issues. “The key to a successful

EAP program is to ensure that staff are aware of the benefits available to them upon hiring,” states Shamika McClean, Human Resources Director.

Mechanisms to improve employee mental health through employers can include:

- Increasing availability of mental health screenings to all employees
  - Development of spaces for relaxation during lunch and breaks during the workday
  - Providing leadership development to recognize signs and symptoms of depression in staff and increase encouragement to seek mental health treatment
  - Improved overall employee health can translate to better patient care.
- Ms. Wayne states, “When my staff is operating at their best, I know our patients are going to succeed.”

Everyone is exposed to mental health issues and SUN Delaware is committed to being proactive in education of staff and patients. By increasing recognition of mental health disorders and concurrently decreasing the stigma, SUN is poised to be a leader in mental health in Delaware. ■

### References

1. American Psychological Association. *Stress in America: Coping with Change, Part 1*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association; 2017.
2. Merikangas KR, Ames M, Cui L, Ustun TB, Von Korff M, Kessler RC. The impact of comorbidity of mental and physical conditions on role disability in the US adult household population. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 2007;64(10):1180–1188.



**Lisa Lowery Deal Pharm.D., FASHP, BCACP, B.S.N.** is the Director of Pharmacy at SUN Behavioral Health Delaware.