

Health Risks Associated with
Work Related Mental Stress

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A 27 year-old Canadian woman, who wished to remain nameless in The Gazette, sat in her doctor's office waiting for the doctor to give the results of her blood tests. Her trip to the doctor's office was not a routine visit, she was defecating blood and her left eyeball was slightly protruded. Anybody would be quite afraid to hear the words uttered out of the doctor's mouth... cancer. Did this young woman have a brain tumor and was this going to be the most horrible, life changing news? The doctor comes into the room and questioned the woman. He did not ask her if she had a history of cancer but asked her about stress. The medical reports did not show any signs of a brain tumor but rather the signs of stress. This stress was a result of her "nightmare boss" who would "suck the energy out of them and leave people depressed or sick". This woman followed her doctor's advice by quitting her job and within months, her health had returned. (Riga 2006).

This woman is just one example of how our job has such a major impact on our well-being and our mental health status. We live in a society where we are constantly on the go and our days are quit fast paced. We have to remain flexible in our ever changing world. Many individuals change their own behaviors in order to make their work environments bearable. They do their best to get through the day. However, the stress of their work environment does not stay at their job when they leave for the day. The burdens, exhaustion, fatigue and stresses of the day go home with them. Their "nightmare boss" or their unreasonable colleagues join them on their ride home from work, while they prepare their meals, as they eat their dinner and even as they lie down to go to sleep for the night and dream. Job related stress has increased in the last decade due to the fast changing business and economic cycles, demanding workloads and job insecurity. "Organizations lose an estimated \$200 billion a year in stress-related accidents, lost productivity, absenteeism, and medical insurance cost." (Neufeld 2006).

My choice to do a paper on health risks associated with work related mental stress stems from my own experiences in my work environments. I have recently changed my job from working in a stressful diagnostic laboratory with pressure of productivity demands, to a job which involves constant interaction with customers. I work in a Medical device company which manufactures medical instrumentation for hospitals, reference laboratories, national diagnostic laboratories as well as international facilities. As part of our business we provide 24/7 support for our instrumentation. The customers could call into the hotline with concerns which could be range from "my controls are out" to "the instrument indicated that it had a Slave 1 motor 2 Jam". It is my responsibility as a Technical Service Specialist to gather as much data as possible and resolve their issue. In many instances, the customers are not very cooperative because they are pressed for time and would like to release their patient results and continue processing more tests. Furthermore, it is important that I solve their concerns in a reasonable amount of time. In order to do this it is imperative that the specialists learn the software and hardware of the instrumentation and also understand the assays and how they run on the instruments. There are times when the phone does not stop ringing and our troubleshooting with the customers not only goes past our lunch breaks but it may entail staying late in the day.

What I thought was a logical move to ease my mind, turned out to be a very stressful environment. I took this position on the advice of a recruiter. I was not aware how demanding the job was and was told that I would have a lot of resources when an issue came up with the customers. What they didn't prepare us for was that the customers may not always be honest with you and figuring out the problems feels like solving a mystery. I sometimes have to think and investigate like a detective. My days are definitely not boring but may seem too challenging.

I did not understand exactly how demanding this job actually was until I came home for the night. I found myself lying on my bed after work, not able to take care of my obligations at home. I came home very nauseous, exhausted and fatigued. My head was hurting immensely and this feeling did not go away after a nap. There were several instances where I was so tired that I dreaded going back to work the next day. In fact, I called out sick on two occasions. The next day, I felt better and realized that my new job was the culprit. The interesting part is that I have only been employed at this company for 5 months with 4 months spent on training. I wasn't sure why I felt this way as I have never felt this sick. I chose to do my research paper on mental stress to better understand what stress is, the facts and factors related to stress, causes, and symptoms and how to cope with the day to day work related stress.

Job stress is a chronic disease caused by conditions in the workplace that negatively affect an individual's performance and/or overall well-being of his/her body and mind. One or more of a host of physical and mental illnesses manifests job stress. In some cases, job stress can be disabling. In chronic cases a psychiatric consultation is usually required to validate the reason and degree of work related stress. The signs of job stress vary from person to person, depending on the particular situation, how long the individual has been subjected to the stressors, and the intensity of the stress itself." (Life Positive 2000). There are numerous amounts of job related mental stress, and in this paper I will discuss anger/frustration, loss of concentration, depression, anxiety, burn out, and heart disease, what causes these stresses, and how we can cope/manage these stresses.

It is essential to understand that the word stress could mean a variety of different things depending on its context and also the subject matter. In physics, stress is the internal distribution of forces within a body that balance and react to the loads applied to it. In medical terms, stress would relate to a wide range of strong external stimuli, both physiological and psychological, which can cause a physiological response called the general adaptation syndrome, first described in 1936 by Hans Selye in the journal Nature. In linguistics, stress is the emphasis given to some syllables." (Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia 2006).

For research purposes, this paper will refer to the psychologically oriented definition of stress. "Stress is an adaptive response, mediated by individual characteristics and /or psychological processes that are a consequence of any external action, situation, or event that places special physical and/or psychological demands upon a person. A potential for stress exists when an environmental situation is perceived as presenting a demand which threatens to exceed the person's capabilities and resources for meeting it, under conditions where he expects a substantial differential in the rewards and costs from meeting the demand versus not meeting it"

(Driskell J. & Salas E. 6). "Stress is a process or a system which includes the stressor, a stressful event, a stress reaction and all the intervening thoughts and feelings and behavior-an overall encompassing rubric. A stressor is a stressful event or a stressful condition that produces in the individual a psychological or physical reaction that usually is unpleasant and sometimes causes symptoms of emotional or physical disability. Finally, a stress reaction concerns the consequences of the stimulus provided by the stressor." (Carone P., Kieffer S., Krinsky L., Yolles S. 5). The demands and pressure placed on an individual in their work environment for a period of time is Chronic Stress.

The Definition of Stress

At times we are depicted as individuals who can do the most amount of work in a short allotted time. To many corporations in our corporate world, that would be considered a success. With this type of success comes a failure, not to the organization but to the selected individual who was depicted as a successful man/woman. This failure is known to many as mental illness which was caused by stress that individual put on themselves for recognition and acceptance by other fellow colleagues at their workplace.

We are always in competition with ourselves/others to be the best that we can be at our current position. We will ask for more responsibilities to get that promotion we want. Today, even if one wants to apply for a new job, some of the desired responsibilities list that the individual have the capabilities of multitasking and work under work well under pressure. Working on five or eight projects at once, can put a huge mental strain on an individual. Individuals all make mistakes in achieving a personal goal where we all multitask with multiple projects and come up with unrealistic expectations. These unrealistic expectations hurt us mentally. We tend to become more angry or frustrated because we may not meet the deadline that we unrealistically set for ourselves.

There are three types of stresses, acute stress, episodic stress and chronic stress. "Acute stress occurs when major event take place in one's life. This could be anything from changing jobs, moving or experiencing a loss. One may feel stressed when things go wrong or unexpectedly happens. However, this type of stress is short-term and does not cause damage to the body as do long-term stress. When acute stress is experienced, the body should normally rest after the stressful events are over. However, if the acute stress is frequent this episodic stress is experienced. Under episodic stress, one may feel like their life is out of control and disorderly. Chronic stress is stress that is ongoing for a long period of time. This stress seems endless and wears you down. It is on going stress that may become part of the individual's life and they may not even recognize that they are under chronic stress. The chronic stress could be the result of traumatic experiences that have changed the brain and become internalized causing stressful feelings" (Hutman, Sheila, Jaelline Jaffe, Ph.D., Robert Segal, M.A., Heather Larson, and Lisa F. Dumke, M.A. December 2005).

The History of Stress

"The concept of stress has been in existence as early as the 14th century to mean hardship, straits, adversity or affliction. In the late 17th century Hooke used

stress in the context of the physical sciences. However, this usage was not made systematic until the early 19th century. The concept of stress and strain (the deformation or distortion of the object) was used to be the basis of ill health in medicine. Walter Cannon in 1932 researched the physiology of emotion and considered stress to be a disturbance of homeostasis under conditions of cold, lack of oxygen, and low blood sugar. Cannon referred to his subjects as being “under stress”. This implied that the degree of stress could be measured. (Folkman S. & Lazarus R 2). Cannon demonstrated the “flight or fight” response that humans and animals have when they are threatened. They traced these reactions to the release of a neurotransmitter, nor-epinephrine, from a part of the medulla of the adrenal gland. Harold G. Wolff in the 1940s and 50s regarded stress as a reaction of an organism overwhelmed by the environmental demands. (Folkman S. & Lazarus R 2).

Claude Bernard, The French Physiologist, derived the concept of dynamic equilibrium. He indicated that in dynamic equilibrium, a steady state in the internal body environment is necessary for survival. External change in the environment or external forces that change the internal balance must be reacted to and compensated for if the organism was to survive. Hans Selye, whose definition of stress is mentioned above, indicated that the pituitary gland at the base of the brain determines a body’s response to stress. Selye’s did a variety of different experiments with rats, inducing stress in them to observe their responses. The rats reacted psychologically and physically to the adverse situation that were imposed on them. Those undergoing constant stress, had an enlargement of their adrenal glands, gastrointestinal ulcers, and atrophy of their immune system. He coined these responses as the General Adaptation Syndrome because the responses the rats had were normal for the organism in warding off stress, however, they could become much like illnesses. “If these adaptive processes were excessive, the body could become damaged”. (MedicineNet 2002). Selye’s experiments with the rats was a stepping stone into understand the connection between how the body reacts to abnormal or excessive stress imposed upon it. In order to fully comprehend this reaction, it is important to understand how the brain actually conducts under stress. After all, 90% of illness is stress-related (Hutman, et al December 2005).

How the Brain functions under stress

The brain's hypothalamus releases the hormone corticotrophin-releasing factor (CRF) and its effects make your guard go up. CRF travels to the pituitary gland and triggers the release of adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH). This hormone travels in the blood to the adrenal glands and instructs them to release a third hormone, cortisol. The hormones rally the body systems and provide energy to help you deal with the stressful situation. Perpetual or severe stress, however, may upset the stress system and harm the brain. Cortisol affects the availability of the fuel supply which is needed to respond to stress. If the cortisol levels remain high then the muscle will breakdown suppressing the immune system. “Cortisol also interferes with the function of neurotransmitters, the chemicals that brain cells use to communicate with each other. Excessive cortisol can make it difficult to think or retrieve long-term memories. It prevents the brain from laying down a new memory, or from accessing already existing memories. Studies done by Robert M. Sapolsky, a renowned brain researcher has shown that the hippocampus,

part of the limbic brain, which is central to learning and memory, can be damaged with excessive cortisol.” (Franklin Institute Online. 2004). The example of memory loss is prevalent in students who “blank out” during an exam. They have short term memory loss due to the excess stress levels and the excess amounts of cortisol that is produced when under stress. Working in Technical services, the employees are under constant stress. When a phone call is received from an angry or frustrated customer it is easy to forget even the simplest of topics. Nonetheless, there are several sources of work stress.

Causes of Mental Stress at Work

There are several factors associated with work that could cause one to have mental stress. There are intrinsic factors such as poor working conditions, shift work, or work load that could cause stress. Other factors such as the role one has in an organization, the chance for career development or even their relationships at work with others affects the way we deal with stresses in our life. Job stress is the physical and emotional responses that occur when a job requirement does not match the capabilities, resource or the needs of the worker. It is important to understand that a certain amount of challenge in a job is good and healthy. Having bit of a challenge at work keeps the employees motivated and prevents boredom and monotony. It allows the worker to remain energized psychologically and physically and when the job is done there is a sense of satisfaction. However, if this challenge supersedes its purpose and becomes too demanding then the satisfaction turns into feelings of stress.

During the last couple of years with companies downsizing and going out of business, job security has been a big factor. It was difficult for those coming right out of school with no job experience to find a good job without another with more experience getting the upper hand. Furthermore, there is always the threat of a company laying people off due to budget problems or take over from other companies. Companies also try to live up to the competition of the job market in order to thrive in their own business. Therefore job insecurity has become a more prominent cause for workplace stress. The fear of losing your job could cause intense levels of anxiety and worry. In many cases, employees may feel like they have to go the extra mile and work more in order to stay off the “next to go” list.

When a job requires more from the employee than they are capable of doing and the workload becomes demanding, the employee feel like they are losing control. There are unrealistic expectations set by the employer which adds unhealthy pressure on the employee resulting in a tremendous source of stress. Long working hours and pressure to perform at one’s maximum capacity becomes very stressful and the employee may not be able to handle this situation and will become physically and emotionally drained.

Working in a poor environment could lead to health problems such as chronic cold syndrome, carpal tunnel syndrome, and depression. (Neufeld 2006). When I was working in the laboratory in the evening shift, I worked predominantly by myself. I worked on Emergency Toxicology specimens and Lung Maturity tests. These tests would come in as Stat specimens and I would have a certain turn around time for them. I was constantly pressured for time. It was important that my results were not only sent

out in a timely manner but were accurate. Not only did I feel overworked and out of control with my work schedule but I felt very anxious. Furthermore, I worked in the laboratory alone so I carried the pressure of the results by myself. This caused me to feel very lonely, unhappy and also very frustrated with my work and the place I was at in my life.

The feeling of loneliness extends to how an individual's relationship with their boss, co-workers or employees is. At my company, I have noticed that many of the employees form groups or "clicks" and do not provide social support to one another. Since I work in Technical Services, we receive calls from customers non-stop to troubleshoot their problems in the lab or hospital. However, many times if the problem is serious, many co-workers back away and do not attempt to help each other evaluate the problems. This causes excessive amounts of stress because the customers would like answers in a timely manner. According to Occupational Stress and Organizational Effectiveness, strong social support from peers relieved job strain and served to mediate the effects of job stress on cortisol, blood pressure, glucose and the number of cigarettes smoked.

The role an individual fulfills in their job can be stressful when they are in conflict. It is stressful to take the responsibility of others in a job and also if an individual has conflicting roles. If an individual has a position that is high-pay hi-stress positions, they feel pressure to make money for their companies and their clients. A financial trader may be afraid of losing their job if they do not keep big accounts. It is important for an individual to have a job that fits their personalities and their mental behavior. Saterfiel and Associates is a company that provides pre-employment testing and performs assessments of personality as well as skills. This allows companies to determine if the candidate is a good match for the position they are applying for. One of the associates from the company gave a presentation at a local company. The CEO of this local company did not think the personality assessment had any validity. To prove the company's accuracy, the associate of the company challenged the CEO to test 10 of their current employees. The catch was that the company associate would not even know the names of the individuals and if the assessment was inaccurate for any of the employees, it would be free of charge.

After several weeks the CEO returned the completed assessments to the company associate. The results of the assessment showed that two of the employees should not have been hired for their current position and one employee that handled large sums of money had an ethics problem (who was indeed embezzling company funds). Nine out of the 10 assessments were accurate. The one assessment that seemed to be inaccurate was for a woman whose report indicated that she would not last more than 2 months. However, she was working in that position for 6 weeks and was doing an excellent job. The Saterfiel and Associates employee did not charge the CEO for his assessment as he was not accurate. Two weeks later the Saterfiel Associates employee received a call from the local company's executive secretary. Apparently the lady in question did not show up for work for a week and a half. The local company received a call from a psychiatrist stating that the employee had a mental breakdown and was hospitalized. The psychiatrist wanted to know if there was anything that occurred at the company that may have caused or contributed to the mental

breakdown. Many cases of depression and anxiety seem to involve the inability to cope with domestic or work related problems. (Saterfiel and Associates 2003).

Surveys conducted by Northwestern National Life, Families and Work Institute and Yale university shows that more than ¼ of the employees had some degree of stress.

Survey by Northwestern National Life



Survey by the Families and Work Institute



Survey by Yale University



(National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. 1999).

Signs/Symptoms

Many times our body is showing warning signs of work-related stress that many of us equate with just being tired or exhausted. Many times symptoms of stress may be masked by other factors. Working with customers on an ongoing basis, I started to have headaches when I came home from work. I didn't equate them with stress but rather equated them with just being tired or possibly being dehydrated. On one instance I came and went to bed thinking that my headache was due to being tired. In fact, after I woke up I still had a headache and had to take a pain reliever. This went on after a couple of weeks until I realized that I only had headaches during the week and not on the weekend. I realized that the headaches were due to stress and nothing more severe. The symptoms of stress are comprised of physical symptoms, emotional/mental symptoms and work-related symptoms. Physical warning signs would include headaches, digestive problems, sleep deprivation, rashes, heartburn, and loss of appetite, chronic back pain or even weight gain. The emotional/mental symptoms would include increased anger, frustration, depression, moodiness, anxiety, problems with memory, fatigue or even increased use of nicotine/drugs/alcohol. Work Related symptoms would include frequent lateness, increased absenteeism, social withdrawal at the workplace, and decrease in work productivity, difficulty understanding procedures or even accidents on the job. Since many of the health risks go unnoticed as being associated with stress it is important to understand the connection between them.

The common cold may be equated with a change of weather when this may actually be due to stress. When we experience stress, be it a combination of physical

or psychological stress, the body releases cortisol, the stress hormone which then causes a negative immune factor, Interleukin-6 (IL6), to be excreted by our immune system. IL6 reduces the good immune factors responsible for halting viruses from reproducing themselves. IL6 causes immune suppression and allows viruses to replicate. Stress reduction will reduce the occurrence of respiratory illness. Excess stress is one factor in the initiation of the cold or flu and dehydration is the other. There have been numerous occasions where I have gotten a cold due to stress. In fact, since I started working in this company, I have gotten about 2 colds where one cold lasted 2 weeks. Nonetheless, the various illnesses that could be caused by job related stress do not end there. A common cold may not be as bad as depression or even heart disease.

Health Risks and Management

Personally I have various job related stress, such as anger/frustration and burn out. Throughout my 4 month training process, I was trained extensively on four of our medical instruments. Technical Service Specialists have to know the hardware of the instrument, understand how the software works and even know how each assay performs on the instrument. The training process is very long and intense. Although the first 4 months were stressful, the real test of how effective the training was came when I had to answer the phones not knowing the problems the customer have or even their mood. It was very frustrating not knowing the answers to questions on the spot.

After training, there is no time to study or even know for sure exactly what type of questions would be asked. For example, an architect called the other day asking if a sheet metal screw could be placed on the instrument so it could be secured on a board in case of an earthquake. The instrument was going to be in a California lab where they are mandated by the state to have their instrument secured in the event of an earthquake. Each day that goes by, I feel myself getting more stressed/frustrated because I may not know the correct answer to their questions pertaining to their medical instrument. It is important to note that the customer may not be pleased with your troubleshooting and may opt to do their own investigations. I have had angry customers hang up the phone. Most of the time, I would have to recheck and ask upper management for guidance. At times I feel stressed knowing that I do not know the answer, or feel other people might think I might not be the best person for this position. I believe the overwhelming extensive training is making it impossible for other beginner co-workers and me to fully carry out our daily duties. When I was training with my mentors, I would get very nervous because the mentors were very strict and would try to keep us on our toes when customers called. There were many instances where my mentor would be too aggressive causing me to get nervous and I would just draw a blank.

Currently we are also short staffed, and are in the process of recruiting and increased our staff. My normal work hours are from eight in the morning till five in the evening. Being that we are short staffed and the numbers of calls keep increasing, on average I am putting in ten-hour workdays, which is making me physically exhausted. My commute to and from work is an one hour. On a regular business day, I am working ten hours and commuting two hours, totaling twelve hours. Almost everyday that I have come home, I am burned out. I just do not feel like eating, I feel overworked, very

fatigued, and all I want to do is sleep and just wake up the next morning to do this routine all over again.

“Burnout is a process that happens gradually over time. It creeps up on a person through an accumulation of random minor negative thoughts, sporadic lost hopes, and a series of small disappointments in oneself. Burnout is a painful process that includes emotional exhaustion, a loss of pleasure in interpersonal relationships, and a diminished sense of self worth. Burnout is the result of trying too hard for too long in a situation where the odds are against meeting one's expectations. People who burn out are intelligent, dedicated people who have high expectations for themselves.” (Curci 2004).

Most of the cures for burnout focus on how to get away from the cause of the distress. The job is considered the prime factor that causes burnout. But, in the same situation, some people burnout and others do not. The usual advice is to get some time away, to take a vacation, change environment. (Curci 2004).

In the midst of researching for this term paper, I realized that I should follow some of the advice I found in my references. I took a 4 day vacation to visit my sister and my 3 year old and 1 year old nieces. Although I dreaded going back to work, it was a well needed vacation.

Another health risk is depression. Depression as we know can happen to anyone at anytime. “Depression is expected to rank second only to heart disease as the leading cause of disability worldwide by 2020. It is also a major cause of death and serious injury — most people who commit or attempt suicide are suffering from depression. Depression affects one-tenth of the population, including one-tenth of all employees.” (Canada Safety Council 2005).

Depression not only affect me but also my organization. “A 2003 AdvancePCS Center for Work and Health survey estimated that depression in the work place costs employers \$44 billion a year. Twenty percent of the costs were due to absenteeism while 80 percent could be attributed to "presenteeism," ie reduced on-the-job productivity. Depression was estimated to result in 5.6 hours a week of lost productivity.” (McMan's Depression and Bipolar Web 2004).

Holistic therapies are applied to heal acute and chronic depression. Besides prescription drugs, healing methods such as naturopathy, energy balancing, and yogic techniques are extensively and effectively utilized all over the world. Also trying to adopt a positive lifestyle could help develop a healthy mind-body frame to avoid depression.

The environment that we work in at our workplace at times seems to be so fast paced that it has become the norm for certain organizations. Anxiety disorders are another type of mental stress that we can commonly find in today's workplace. “Anxiety disorders are types of mental disorders. The person feels highly sensitized, in great discomfort and may be afraid of a panic attack. An anxiety disorder is a constant feeling of tension. It is not the mild anxiety that many people occasionally feel. A panic attack is common to each type of anxiety disorder. A panic attack is a sudden feeling of intense terror, which may occur in certain situations or for no apparent reason. Symptoms may include shortness of breath, dizziness, choking and nausea. The cause of panic attacks is unknown but they are most likely a chemical response in the brain, caused by actual stressful events or thinking about stressful events. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health problem. They occur in one in 10 people. In most cases, they

result from a range of physical, chemical and situational factors which can make them difficult to diagnose.” (Better Health Channel 2005).

There are a variety of treatment methods to combat anxiety. Acupuncture, mental exercises, relaxation techniques, massage or even aromatherapy could help treat anxiety.

Acupuncture: Anxiety causes tension that disrupts the flow of the qi. Acupuncture can help to restore harmony and induce a state of deep relaxation.

Mental Exercises: Meditation, guided imagery, art, music, and other mental exercises are a useful way to reduce stress and promote relaxation in your life.

Relaxation Techniques: Slow, diaphragmatic breathing and conscious muscle relaxation can help to manage stress by calming the body and clearing the mind of stressors.

Aromatherapy: Essential oils of lavender, chamomile, geranium, rose, neroli, sweet marjoram, and ylang-ylang are commonly recommended for stress relief. They help to reduce anxiety and tension and can be used in a massage, added to a bath, or inhaled through a vaporizer.

Massage: A regular massage in which the practitioner uses such techniques as rubbing, kneading, and pummeling, can be very beneficial in the management of anxiety attacks. It can help to increase blood circulation, reduce pain, and relieve muscle tension.

Massage also helps to release endorphins, substances that have a mood-enhancing effect. (Group, Edward F.III, DC, ND, DACBN 2006).

My company provides a free gym membership to each of their employees. They also provide a free massage session which entails a professional masseuse coming to work to massage our back shoulder and fingers. This helps release some of the tensions and the burdens of the day to day work environment.

A very important topic that I wanted to discuss about was mental stress causing heart diseases. “Myocardial Infarction and Stress: Stress is known to be a risk factor in the development of myocardial infarction (MI). When stress is present in the human body, it activates reactions of the autonomic nervous system and endocrine system: catecholamine secretion increases, and blood pressure elevation and immunosuppression follow, which result in facilitation of the aggregation and coagulation system of thrombocytes. If this facilitation continues for a longer period, it may cause arteriosclerosis, which could end up with the onset of MI. (Hiramatsu, Kimiko, et al. 2002).

The researchers, including lead author Srikanth Ramachandrani, M.D., monitored heart blood flow in 29 patients as they performed a mentally stressful role-playing scenario. All of the patients had coronary artery disease, but they had been treated and did not show any signs of ischemia (decreased heart muscle blood flow) on either treadmill tests or after an injection with a chemical that puts stress on heart blood flow. Mental stress has been shown to produce ischemia in heart disease patients who also have problems during exercise or chemical stress tests, but this is the first such study specifically designed to look at this broader group of patients. (Science Daily 2006).

Dr. Randall Hansen did numerous studies to show us statistics of job stress effecting individuals mentally and physically in America.

A Princeton Survey Research Associates study reports that three-fourths of employees believe the worker has more on-the-job stress than a generation ago.

A Gallup Poll found that 80 percent of workers feel stress on the job, and nearly half reported that they needed help in learning how to manage it.

According to an article in Shape Magazine, women are 60 percent more likely to suffer from job stress than men. (Hansen 2006).

2000 Integra Survey/other statistics similarly reported that:

65% of workers said that workplace stress had caused difficulties and more than 10 percent described these as having major effects.

10% said they work in an atmosphere where physical violence has occurred because of job stress and in this group, 42% report that yelling and other verbal abuse is common.

29% had yelled at co-workers because of workplace stress,

19% or almost one in five respondents had quit a previous position because of job stress and nearly one in four have been driven to tears because of workplace stress.

62% routinely find that they end the day with work-related neck pain, 44% reported stressed-out eyes, 38% complained of hurting hands and 34% reported difficulty in sleeping because they were too stressed-out.

12% had called in sick because of job stress.

Over half said they often spend 12-hour days on work related duties and an equal number frequently skip lunch because of the stress of job demands.

In California, the number of Workers' compensation claims for mental stress increased by almost 700 percent over eight years and ninety percent were successful with an average award of \$15,000 compared to a national average of \$3,420.

(Murphy, Lawrence & Schoenborn, Theodore. May 1987).

The statistics are compelling but also accepted in today's society. Dr. Hansen's statistics on Gallup' Poll of 80 percent of workers in America who participate in this survey felt they were feeling stress at their workplace, which is astonishing. Knowing these statistics today's workforce can only cope with these health risks and try to personally treat them or seek medical assistance, by seeing a doctor or taking medications. Note that the Integra Survey 2000 stated that about 12% of employees would call in sick because of stress. I personally had to call in sick on a couple of occasions, because of burnout and mental stress due to work.

The burden of mental stress at our workplace will not diminish, but we can manage stress and gain knowledge of how to cope with stress. Managing stress at work has to involve both managers and employers working together to finding a solution. "To reduce stress at work, an individual should try to maintain a balance between work and family or personal life, a supportive network of friends and coworkers, and a relaxed and positive outlook. But it is also important that the workplace is a "healthy" organization. There are several ways to reduce stress in the workplace. While the employee may not have control over whether the workplace entirely supports a more stress-free lifestyle, possible changes can be made, or individuals can make an educated decision as to whether the workplace is right for him or her." (Jaffe , Jaelline Ph.D, et al 2006).

Recent research suggests that policies benefiting worker health actually benefit the bottom line. A healthy organization—one that has low rates of illness, injury, and disability in its workforce—is competitive in the marketplace. NIOSH research has found the following organizational characteristics to be associated with both healthy, low-stress work and high levels of productivity:

recognition of employees for good work performance

opportunities for career development

an organizational culture that values the individual worker

management actions consistent with organizational values

(Jaffe , Jaelline Ph.D, et al 2006).

Mental or physical stress at work or anywhere else is something that can not be eliminated from our lives. Stress has become a huge health risk in our daily lives. Today's society is based on minimizing expenses and maximizing revenues as quickly as you can. In turn they try to gain the maximum output from an employee with the minimal amount of employees. However, it is important for the companies to assess the mental health status of their employees. For example, the number of calls my department receives is astonishing and overwhelming. My department consists of 21 technical service specialists (3 of which just finished training and another 3 that are still in training). The amounts of calls that do come in are more than what we can handle currently. There are instances where calls go over out lunch breaks. In a stressful environment, it is important to take frequent breaks. In our case, it is difficult to get out of our seats because we may miss a call. Our goal is to reach each customer live. This type of behavior is great for the organization where they are ok with having a limited amount of employees taking the maximum amounts of calls, because it is less expense for them. However, the health of the employees is at stake.

Conclusion

Our society has changed dramatically throughout the years and so have the degree of levels of stress. My organization does have a massage therapist coming in on a bi-weekly basis, but that does nothing to the reduce stress in the long run. We need to find a solution that will eliminate stress all together. But throughout this research paper and my own personal experience finding a solution will never become a reality. As individuals all we can do it find better efficient procedures to cope and manage stress. As you can see from the statistics I have referenced, many organizations in the past have been sued significantly because of job related stress. I strongly believe that organizations need to find different ways of coping and managing stress than what they currently practice, or they will continue being sued. The organization need to offer more educational programs on coping with stress for the employees but also need to stress the effects of stress to management. The managers need to understand what the signs and symptoms of stress are so they could effectively aid their employees that look like they are getting overwhelmed or stressed.

In my current position, I will make sure that I observe my reactions to situation and determine the type of work environments or situations that cause the most stress. I will relay this information to my supervisor and ask them for guidance in dealing with the situation at hand. I will also deal with certain stresses at the moment rather than dwell

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on them and bring them home with me. If a customer is very aggressive and angry I will ask the senior specialist to help me with the call and talk to the customer as they are not responsive to me. Furthermore, I will make sure I make time for myself to relax and organize my time at work to ensure that I am able to take my lunch breaks and also get home in a timely manner. However, if these management steps do not help then I will consider changing my job. I have learned from my work experience and this research that a job is not worth getting ill.

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