



# MEDICAL DIRECTOR REPORT

Volume 3.2  
Q2 2008

*An Occupational and Environmental Health Network Publication*

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Welcome to the Occupational and Environmental Health Network (OEHN) Medical Director Report Publication. This quarter's issue focuses on Presenteeism: The loss in productivity that occurs when workers are on the job, but not performing at their best.. We hope you will take some time to read through the various columns, features, facts, and knowledge regarding the impact that Presenteeism is taking on Occupational Medicine. Our goal is to connect with our key partners, physicians, allied health professionals, and resources to enhance your knowledge of Occupational Medicine.

OEHN delivers premier onsite Medical Director leadership and program oversight for occupational health departments across the country. In this capacity OEHN helps reduce the occurrence of presenteeism and therefore improve the bottom line of companies across the country.

On behalf of the entire staff at OEHN, **thanks for reading.**

Regards,

Thomas H. Winters, MD, President, Chief Medical Officer and Principal, Visiting Lecturer at HMS  
Lee Okurowski, MD, Chief Executive Officer, Chief Financial Officer and Medical Director

## **OEHN: *Focusing on Presenteeism***

### **OEHN TEAM**

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### **Presenteeism**

#### **Maximizing Investment with Human Capital**

Presenteeism is the next area of focus as companies seek to maximize their investment in human capital by improving productivity and promoting employee health and wellness.

Innovative and forward-thinking companies are studying the next component in the productivity equation. It's known as presenteeism, or the loss in productivity that occurs when workers are on the job, but not performing their best.

Historically, absenteeism--tracking and managing the incidents of planned and unplanned employee absences--has been a major focus for many employers. But what about the employee who is at work but not fully functioning? What causes presenteeism? How do employers identify and intervene to help their employees achieve optimal productivity?

Looking at presenteeism, the focus shifts to the employee who is not performing at his or her best due to outside factors that include chronic or episodic illness, distraction from family care needs, personal problems or other concerns.

*Continued on Page 3.*

### **HSPH Honors Dr. Tom Winters**

#### **Clinical Professor of the Year**

The Occupational & Environmental Medicine Residency Program at the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) awarded Dr. Thomas H. Winters the "Clinical Professor of the Year Award" for 2007-2008. The award recognizes dedication, leadership and invaluable contributions to the advancement of the residency program. Dr. Winters will be honored at an awards dinner on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2008. See what Dr. Philip Parks of HSPH says about Dr. Winters on Page 4.

### **Millender Series Conference**

#### **Psychiatry in the Workplace**

On February 12, 2008, OEHN hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Lewis H. Millender, MD Educational Series event at the Waltham Woods Conference Center. The event was titled: "Risk versus Benefits of Short and Long Term Opiate Use and The Psychiatrist at the Workplace." The featured speakers, Dr. Brian Johnson and Dr. David Rosmarin shared their expertise through case studies and answering audience questions. CME and CEU credits were awarded to the 75 plus occupational health professionals who attended the event.

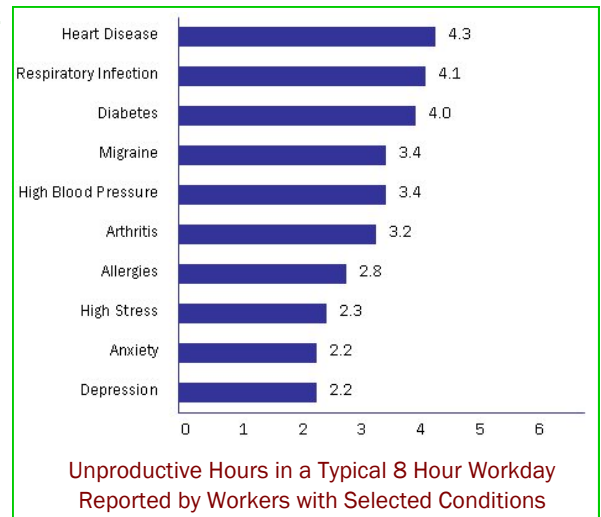
## OEHN Special Report: *Presenteeism: Unproductive Hours*

Employers have an important role to play in managing employee health and productivity. Presenteeism is costly. A study by Advance PCS, a provider of health improvement services, found that lost productivity was significantly greater from days at work while sick (72 percent) compared to missed work days due to illness. Thus the total lost of productivity is \$250 billion annually, the estimated presenteeism cost is \$180 billion. Presenteeism could account for as much as 61 percent of the total cost of worker illness. The chart to the right shows the average number of unproductive hours in a typical 8-hour day reported by workers with selected conditions. While this table represents the high rate of presenteeism for the typical worker, those in the health care profession have a higher percentage, including suffering from exhaustion, cynicism, and general ineffectiveness on their job. These symptoms can eventually lead to burnout not only for those in the health care profession but those in other professions as well.

Remember, as with most work related issues, awareness is the key, the origin, the beginning of finding solutions. Study your operations in light of the statistics presented in this report. Take actions to prepare for these inevitable situations and build their associated costs into your business model, rather than being caught by surprise at the end of the fiscal year with drastically reduced profit margins without a reasonable explanation.

Smart business persons will become aware of the costs of Presenteeism and take action up-front to protect their business.

References: <http://hab.hrsa.gov/publications/march2007/default.htm>



### Leadership and the Occupational Health Nurse — by Joe Flynn COO, OEHN

Since entering the occupational health arena, I have come to admire the effective leadership of the occupational health nurse. Leadership begins when an occupational health nurse (OHN) enters the front door of their workplace. Their position requires a broad scope of knowledge, skills and abilities in many areas.

In most instances, OHN's deliver a significant impact across their respective organizations. Some examples include designing and leading integrated disability management programs; serve as a resource for the reduction of lost work days and developing effective risk management programs while reducing workers compensation claims.

In the forefront of recognizing and addressing potential workplace hazards, OHN's are integral leaders for compliance and regulatory activities. Their core role is in delivering best practice clinical care to the many stakeholders of an organization.

From a corporate financial perspective, there are numerous business

side gaps which are lacking across the occupational health nurse field. In some organizations, OHN's are not exposed or linked with corporate functions like financial management and strategic planning. Many are removed from interfacing with senior management, in order to position themselves and/or their departments on the organization's radar.

Occupation health impacts the bottom line of organizations. There are many indicators available to quantify and measure the value of an organizations occupational health department. For example, according to a study by Advance PCS, a provider of health improvement services, an estimated \$180 billion is lost every year in the US from decreased productivity linked to presenteeism. Measured indicators should be developed and shared with CFO's and other key organization stakeholders.

#### *The Value Proposition*

Looking beyond those points, the occupational health nurse is linked to taking the daily health pulse of the organization. Most perform their job roles as quiet leaders without fanfare. They

remain a constant source of strength under multiple organization restructuring, layoffs, outsourcing initiatives and budget constraints.

Most OHN's work independently and are adaptive and situational leaders. They strive to stay connected and aligned with an organization's vision. In a complex and unpredictable business world, the OHN is a self educating leader across multiple organization segments.

On a daily basis, across the US and to millions of American workers the occupational health nurse brings a sense of optimism, coaching, listening, compassion and leadership to the diverse workforce they serve. The impact is realized for many, the outcomes are to be determined.

Without doubt, the OHN is critical to an organization's ecosystem. Take the role away and an organization open its doors to significant risk.

Leaders you are.

For inquires about this column please email Joe Flynn at [JFlynn@OEHN.net](mailto:JFlynn@OEHN.net).

## ***OEHNs Occupational Health Achievement Award Winner: Dr. Walter Panis***

Earlier this year at the Millender Educational Series event Dr. Thomas Winters presented the first ever OEHN Occupational Medicine Service Achievement Award to Dr. Walter Panis.

“Dr. Panis has been an inspiring leader not only to OEHN but to every colleague and patient he has encountered for the past 33 years. He is committed to being a leader through teaching, research and clinical contributions. A constant source of inspiration and guidance for us all,” said Dr. Winters.

Dr. Panis is Board Certified in both Neurology and Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. Currently, he is the Medical Director at the NEBH Occupational Medicine Center. He is also a Consulting Neurologist at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital and an Instructor in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at Harvard Medical School.

Dr. Panis’s main interest is in the functional recovery from injuries to the musculoskeletal system. His main desire is to help injured workers return to work as soon as possible.

## ***OEHN Knowledge Corner: Presenteeism, The Hidden Costs of Business***

Statistically, Presenteeism rears its ugly head and shows itself for what it really is... a costly, somewhat unseen threat to employers. It is considered a threat because of its stealthy nature. The term itself is new, only recently added to our language. Considering the following alarming statistics, your business may be in danger.

Presenteeism accounts for 61% of an employees total lost productivity and medical costs.

Presenteeism costs employers an estimated \$2000/yr/employee.

Employees working at diminished capacity cost employers \$250 Billion/yr.

42% of employees anticipate elder care issues over the next five years. One of the most commonly requested resources from EAP’s are legal services to cover estate planning, family law, divorce, real estate, bankruptcy and other non-workplace issues, accounting for 60-70% of all EAP requests from employees.

64% of unscheduled absences are due to family issues 22%, personal needs 18%, an entitlement mentality 13% and stress 11%.

30% of employees come to work at least 5 days when they are too distracted to be effective. 28% of workers took time off for care giving and 25% took at least 1 hour/day to deal with personal issues.

Costs of all of the expenses related to absence, unscheduled time off has the biggest impact on productivity, profitability and morale.

49% of employees lose productivity at a rate of 1 hour or more/day due to stress

68% of employees take frequent “stress breaks” at work to talk with others.

Employers must begin to encourage sick or distraught workers to stay home and get appropriate medical or professional attention before returning to work. Consider funding or partially funding an on-site day-care facility. There are many successful models to emulate. Consider expanding or modifying personal leave policies to better aid employees. Expand EAP programs to offer additional employee assistance in a wide range of emotional and family issues. This also has the unseen benefit of enhancing goodwill and demonstrating to employees that their employer cares about their concerns. While these actions may appear to be costly, they are actually an investment in your business.

## ***Presenteeism (Continued from Page 1.): Riskier than Absenteeism***

In an issue of The Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, a team of researchers analyzed information from a medical database of 375,000 employees in the United States as well as five productivity surveys on 10 common health conditions, like hypertension and diabetes. The researchers, primarily from the Institute for Health and Productivity Studies at Cornell University and the health-information company Medstat, found that as much as 60 percent of the total cost of worker illness stems from "on-the-job productivity losses" – exceeding what companies spend on medical and disability benefits and sick days. The biggest productivity drains, according to the study, are relatively benign

ailments like headaches, allergies and arthritis. Another recent study, conducted by Walter Stewart, a health researcher, calculated that presenteeism costs American businesses more than \$150 billion per year in decreased productivity

To learn more about our workplace Presenteeism solutions contact OEHN at 508.251.7260 or visit our website: [www.OEHN.net](http://www.OEHN.net)

(This article includes excerpts from :  
Risk & Insurance, March, 2004 by Marybeth Stevens;  
Presenteeism by JASON ZENGERLE Published: December 12, 2004)

## Presenteeism: Employer Solutions

The first step in solving a problem is often recognizing there is a problem in the first place. Then you ask yourself, "What Can I Do? Here are some steps your company can take to reduce presenteeism.

### Rethink the use of disciplinary action to control absenteeism

According to the 2004 CCH Unscheduled Absence Survey conducted by Harris Interactive, disciplinary action remained the single-most used absence control program, with 91 percent of surveyed organizations reporting its use. Employers want their employees on the job and using as few sick days as possible, but CCH says employers that rely on disciplinary action to control absenteeism and abuse of sick time are unknowingly encouraging presenteeism.

### Develop a workplace policy on presenteeism and inform and educate employees

Employees need to know where your company stands on coming to work sick, and how doing so can infect others. Establish and communicate guidelines. Help employees understand under what conditions they should stay home, and when it's OK to return to work. In workplaces where the protection of the public is critical and essential to staying in business, employers may want to take disciplinary action or dismiss workers who are found in violation of company policy.

Many companies with presenteeism problems report that they also try to combat the issue by sending sick employees home. Where possible, employees are given the option to telecommute and work from home when not well.

### Provide Paid Sick Leave and/or Paid Time Off to Workers

According to the National Partnership for Women & Families, our national economy would experience a net savings of \$8.2 billion per year if workers were provided just seven paid sick days per year. This in addition to employers benefiting from reduced turnover, higher productivity and reducing the spread of contagion in the workplace.

Paid Time Off (PTO) programs are increasingly being offered by employers. In these programs, all time off is combined into a single bank of days. Employees have the flexibility to take these days in a way that will meet their individual needs.

### Make an effort to boost employee morale

According to the CCH survey, morale had a significant impact on the incidence of presenteeism. They found that companies with low morale had more ill workers showing up for work. In their study, 52 percent of organizations with "poor/fair" morale reported presenteeism was a problem; this compared with just 31 percent of organizations with "good/very good" morale seeing presenteeism as an issue.

### Offer a flu vaccination program

One way for employers to combat presenteeism is to pay for medical measures that can either prevent common illnesses or reduce existing symptoms. One such illness that can easily infect just about everyone in an office is influenza, aka "the flu," which is extremely contagious. Recovery from the flu can take three to seven days, or longer.

The image of an employee who comes to work sick-as-a-dog as a dedicated and valued worker is no longer apropos. Presenteeism costs are a real and potentially significant drain on a company's financial well-being. Employers need to make a concerted effort to develop a workplace with healthy and highly functioning workers. This will go a long way toward meeting goals for company productivity and profits, and fostering a healthy work culture and environment for employees.

For more information about combating Presenteeism in your workplace contact OEHN at 508 251 7260.

References: <http://www.businessknowhow.com/manage/presenteeism.htm>



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## OEHN Feedback Corner

OEHN's President and Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Tom Winters was awarded the Harvard School of Public Health "Clinical Professor of the Year" on May 9th, 2008.

*"Dr. Winters has made a major impact on our residency program. His contributions, along with OEHN's, have enhanced the value of our program. Dr. Winters is well deserving of this honor."* said Philip D. Parks, MD, MPH, MOH, a Resident Physician & Research Fellow at the Occupational & Environmental Medicine department at Harvard School of Public Health.

## OEHN Overview

Who are we? OEHN delivers premier onsite Medical Director leadership and program oversight for employee and occupational health departments across the country. OEHN is supported by a team of Board Certified Occupational Health physicians, program management staff, project managers and consultants. Its network of twelve hospital clinics and a local, regional, and national network of occupational medicine resources provide labor unions, organizations, hospitals, disability management providers, and the government with a comprehensive portfolio of occupational medicine solutions.