



DECLARATION BY THE ASSOCIATION DES MÉDECINS PSYCHIATRES DU QUÉBEC

on mental health in the workplace

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The Association des médecins psychiatres du Québec (AMPQ) joins voices with numerous sectors of society, including the business community, the insurance industry, occupational health and safety agencies, the national public health institutions, professional associations and government, in calling upon society to focus greater attention on mental health in the workplace and to dedicate more resources to services and research on innovative solutions in this regard. We have learned from our patients that the sense of not having control over one's working conditions is detrimental to one's psychological well-being. Let us then mobilize for the sake of our own mental health.

The AMPQ is acutely aware of the magnitude that the problem of mental illness in the workplace has reached over the years. Among corporations, insurance companies, government agencies, and unions concerned with absenteeism and presenteeism, a consensus seems to have emerged: An organization's mental health and productivity hinges on the mental health of its employees. Common depression, anxiety and substance abuse disorders have become the leading cause of disability among diseases in the workplace, in both the private and the public sectors. The problem is just as critical in Quebec as elsewhere in Canada or in the industrialized world. Each year, nearly 10% of the workforce suffers from mental illness, particularly depression, anxiety and substance abuse disorders. Among persons suffering from severe mental disorder, less than 15% manage to find regular employment despite the desire for reinsertion. Mental disorders are associated with more than 30% to 40 % of all disability claims, totalling some \$15 to \$30 billion per year in Canada. Occupational disability translates into lost productivity owing to absenteeism and presenteeism, which amounts to another loss of \$4.5 billion per year.

Stress in the workplace is on the rise. The phenomenon has been associated with globalization, loss of job security and misguided organizational practices. Undue stress in the workplace is associated as much with increased mental illness as with cardiovascular disease. Psychiatrists are perfectly aware that they themselves are not immune to mental health problems owing to undue stress at work. Nor are their medical colleagues, nursing staff and other professionals who, along with them, provide mental health care.

Research has demonstrated promising approaches to preventing the outbreak of mental illness in the workplace and effective treatments for most mental disorders. Unfortunately, it has also revealed a lack of tried-and-true programs for delivering services to a wider population, returning people to work, and managing the disability of workers with mental health problems. Moreover, the stigmatization of the mentally ill is not something that affects only the severely disordered; it can explain why most persons with mental problems resist consulting health professionals.

In the mental health sector, the psychiatric profession is more and more structured and regulated and practice, more and more evaluated. We are witnessing nowadays the globalization of healthcare services. Our practice today falls somewhere between American managed care and the European client-based approach. It is still possible for us to assert our choices as to the role we wish to play with respect to the current economic stakes regarding the cost of our healthcare system (i.e., the public vs. private debate) and the cost of disability for persons with mental health problems. Physician-psychiatrists recognize that they have the responsibility of transforming the role of medical specialist through deep integration with the roles of mental health collaborator, manager and promoter.

The AMPQ believes that psychiatrists have a role to play in collaboration with the other professionals of the healthcare and social services sector, with government, and with the private sector, both insurance firms and companies. The AMPQ endorses the organization of care proposed by the MSSS and the World Health Organization, in terms of the hierarchization of care and of the central role of primary care services in treating and monitoring most of the people with common mental disorders. Psychiatrists are the ones who can contribute most to improve service access by working in collaboration with primary-care services and those available in the workplace. Psychiatrists are experts in the diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders but should be called upon only when cases become more complex or prove resistant to usual treatment.

The AMPQ also defends the right of the severely mentally disordered to regular employment and will work in conjunction with the groups concerned to diminish discrimination against mentally ill persons in the workplace and elsewhere in society.