



# Insomnia remains unrecognized problem in workforce

BY [AMANDA MCGRORY-DIXON](#)

November 16, 2012

Although insomnia plagues many people, it remains an unrecognized problem in the work force. When workers suffer from insomnia, they become irritable, forgetful and impulsive, all of which leads to mistakes and productivity losses, and supervisors have a tendency to focus on the negative outcomes of insomnia rather than examine the root problem, says Alison Daily, RN, BSN, CCM, FLMI, second vice president of clinical and vocational services at The Standard.

Many supervisors fail to determine the underlying cause because they are uncomfortable with the conversation that must take place, Daily says; however, it does not have to be difficult. Simply asking open-ended questions about the employee's situation is often enough to encourage communication.

"Insomnia is something employers should be very concerned about," Daily says. "In fact, functional impairment in the occupational setting is actually part of the diagnostic criteria. By definition, insomnia leads to problems in the workplace."

Not only does insomnia negatively impact productivity but it can also lead to other medical problems, such as diabetes, obesity, depression and heart attacks, Daily says. Of course, with these additional medical problems impacting the work force, an employer can expect to see its health care costs rise if these issues are not managed.

While insomnia can cause many workplace problems, it is an issue that can be controlled by the employer, Daily says. Insomnia and stress share a strong correlation, and among the top employee stressors are high workloads, low support from co-workers or supervisors, and not having control over work. Typically, an employer can't control the workload, but it can open communication to create a more productive work environment.

"An employer needs to let a stressed employee know that it is there for them to remove those obstacles that prevent work from being done," Daily says. "Employees need to know they are valued and supported. That's the most fundamental solution. It sounds so basic, but it's really the key to opening the communications."

An employer can also leverage its employee-assistance program to help those suffering from insomnia, Daily says. Through an EAP program, employees are connected with counselors, many of who even have experience with sleep disorders, to remedy the insomnia through medical treatments or behavioral therapies.

Behavioral therapies especially have been proven effective in treating insomnia, Daily says. In fact, according to an analysis of 48 clinical trials by the National Center for Biotechnology Information, anywhere from 70 to 80 percent of patients who received behavioral therapies for at least six months benefitted from treatment.

“EAPs are the most underutilized benefit that can make the greatest impact on employee satisfaction, engagement and productivity,” Daily says. “Getting those employees into the EAP is the first step on the road to recovery.”