

### Migraines Cost Employers Millions in Productivity

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Description: Lost productivity due to migraines could be enough to give business owners their own headaches -- a recent

University of Michigan study pegged Bank One's annual loss due to migraines at more than \$20 million. (J. of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Jun-2002)

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Migraines cost employers millions in productivity, but interventions can help

ANN ARBOR---Lost productivity due to migraines could be enough to give business owners their own headaches---a recent University of Michigan study pegged Bank One's annual loss due to migraines at more than \$20 million.

"Employers are affected in two ways: the direct cost of employee health care manifested in medical and pharmacy benefit plan claims and the indirect costs connected with employees' lost productivity," said Alyssa B. Schultz, a research associate at the U-M Health Management Research Center, which conducted the study with Chicago-based Bank One, the nation's sixth-largest financial services corporation.

Migraine headaches---often debilitating with symptoms of nausea, sensitivity to light and intense pain---plague an estimated 6 percent of men and 18 percent of women in the United States.

Although large epidemiological studies have established the national prevalence of migraines and suggested their big costs, few employers have been able to apply these projections to their specific work force.

The U-M research center worked with Bank One to distribute a health risk appraisal to about 93,000 employees in 2000. It included specific questions related to chronic disease including heart disease, diabetes, migraine headache, back pain and cancer, said Bank One Medical Director Wayne Burton, M.D. Twenty-one percent, or 19,853 employees, returned the questionnaire.

Analyzing demographic and payroll data along with the survey responses, the researchers estimated corporate costs due to migraine-related absenteeism and reduced on-the-job productivity to total \$21.5 to \$24.4 million for the year, Burton said.

"Of the nearly 20,000 respondents, 20 percent reported a history of migraine headaches," Schultz said. "Only back pain (34 percent) and seasonal allergies (44 percent) were more frequent than migraine."

Migraines were prevalent in nearly 8 percent of the men and 23 percent of the women, closely comparable to rates reported in national surveys, she said. The figures were especially pertinent to Bank One because 70 percent of its employees are women.

"The economic impact of migraine headaches on employers costs is significant because the incidence peaks during the ages of 25 to 55, the prime working years," Schultz said.

Researchers used data from two prior population-based work loss studies to estimate Bank One's total migraine-related lost workdays at 118,578 for the year 2000. Forty percent (46,846) of these were actual days absent and 60 percent (71,732) represented lost efficiency while at work. The findings were published in the June issue of the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. (<http://www.joem.org/>)

"In general, people with migraines say they prefer to go to work and/or stay at work while suffering the headache," Schultz said. "The cost of reduced efficiency is less visible but very much present."

Dee Edington, Health Management Research Center director, said: "We are finding in a number of studies that the productivity costs related to what might be called 'secondary' chronic diseases, such as migraine headaches, arthritis, allergies and back pain, are equivalent to the medical costs related to such severe conditions as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and cancer."

What can employers do?

"Work place health care interventions such as occupational health departments and work site disease management programs can save costs by providing education, preventive

services and appropriate direct treatment within the work place, where a large part of health-related costs are borne," Burton said.

"Earlier treatment may reduce the intensity or duration and allow the employee to resume work, even if not fully recovered," he said. "It is in an employer's best interests to take a proactive approach to limiting the impact of migraine headaches in the work place."

For more information, visit the Health Management Research Center at <http://www.umich.edu/~hmrc/>. Or check out the U-M Health System fact sheet on headaches at <http://www.med.umich.edu/1libr/topics/brain09.htm>. Also, visit the National Headache Foundation at <http://www.headaches.org/>

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EDITORS: U-M has professional TV studios and uplink capabilities, so we can make experts available for on-camera interviews. We also have photos of Alyssa Schultz and Dee Edington.

Web version: <http://www.umich.edu/~newsinfo/Releases/2002/Aug02/r080802b.html>