Osteoarthritis in the Workplace:
A serious and costly disease

What can employers do to help reduce the burden?

Arthritis

Musculoskeletal diseases affect more than 50% of people in the United States age 18 and over. Trauma, back pain, and arthritis are the three most common musculoskeletal conditions reported.

1 in 7

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common form of arthritis, affecting 1 in 7 US adults.

Among people younger than 45, OA is more common among men; above age 45, OA is more common in women.

Arthritis is a leading cause of disability among adults in the U.S.

The knee is the most common site for OA, followed by the hip. OA of the knee accounts for about one-third (31%) of outpatient healthcare visits for OA.

OA is among the most expensive conditions to treat when joint replacement surgery is required. In fact, OA was the second most costly health condition treated at US hospitals in 2013, accounting for $16.5 billion.

More than half of individuals with symptomatic knee OA are of working age (younger than 65).

OA and other health conditions

31% of people with OA have 5 or more other chronic conditions, with the most common being heart disease, diabetes mellitus and hypertension. OA significantly limits a person’s ability to self-manage other conditions, such as diabetes and hypertension, because OA-related pain is associated with reduced physical activity. OA is associated with increased risk of disability and activity limitations.

Productivity and cost of OA in the workplace

In 2013, total lost wages due to any form of arthritis were $164 billion. Adults with arthritis earned $4,040 less pay annually compared to those without.

In 2013, fewer adults with arthritis (77%) were able to work compared to adults without arthritis (84%).

For employees with OA, OA pain can result in missed days of work (absenteeism) and less productivity while at work (presenteeism).

✓ Presenteeism is the primary source of work impairment, with almost 10 hours per week lost while at work

✓ Workers with OA are more likely to be absent from work and miss more days of work than workers without OA

Musculoskeletal disorders are the most common cause of short-term disability claims. Disability claims related to OA are among the longest in duration and most expensive among all conditions.

*This data is from medical claims.

What can employers do?

Employers should be asking themselves these questions:

- What is the prevalence of OA in your workforce?
- How are your employees with OA utilizing the health care system? Are employees using primary or specialty care? Are employees engaged in disease management programs?
- How are your employees with OA utilizing their disability, workers compensation, occupational health services, injury and leave benefits?
- What onsite support programs like physical or occupational therapy and yoga do you offer?
- How does your workplace support employees with arthritis through safety programs, benefits, ergonomic supports, etc?

For more information about arthritis in the workplace and to get tips on making your workplace more arthritis-inclusive, visit www.oacaretools.org.

OAAA collaborated with Pfizer in the development of this resource.

References