

# Preventing depression in small and medium enterprises

—Starting the collaborations beyond the boundaries—

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## **1. The background of establishment of the OMHO**

In order to prevent “depression” from the workplace in small and med-sized enterprises, “the Organization for Industrial and Occupational Mental Health (OMHO)” was established in Sagamihara City, Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan, with collaborating to industrial, academic workers and lawyers.

According to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare in Japan, depression patients are 1.1 million people in Japan, 3 times compared to 20 years ago. Mental disorders such as depression are newly added to stroke, cancer, myocardial infarction, diabetes which has been regarded as “Japanese four major diseases”. For many companies, mental health measures that do not cause depressions in the workplaces are an urgent issue. However, how is the actual situation? Compared to major companies, mental health measures for small and med-sized enterprises are still insufficient. “Stress-checking system” which has started from the end of 2015 is a system that obliges companies to check stress once a year, but it obliges to the companies or workplaces with 50 or more employees. So small and mid-sized enterprises with 50 or less employees are excluded and they are de facto “blind spots”. However, small companies with few employees may serious problems if depressed employees continued in succession. Works would not make it and even develop the problems of business continuity.

The OMHO was established from a sense of crisis as regional small and mid-sized entrepreneurs, social insurance labors and industrial mental health experts. The number of member companies aims at 30 companies (mainly for industrial companies) in the first year.

The writer, the organizer and representative of the OMHO, runs a company “Shonan Design” which makes prototypes in Sagamihara City. Since some employees took the

leave of absence from “depression” in several years ago, I became interested in psychiatrics. I have continued studying between management and acquired the qualifications for psychiatric social workers. When I talked with other presidents of small and mid-sized enterprises, I noticed that they also had worries about employees taking the absence due to depression. And I thought “Firstly, we should deepen our knowledge about mental illness”, and this led to the establishment of the OMHO with joining experts of mental health and lawyers. Since almost small and mid-sized enterprises are top-down systems of their presidents, if the president has no interest, mental health measures can’t make it.

## **2. Major activities of the OMHO**

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We the OMHO believe that the important thing for the mental health measures is education, especially for management. Therefore, we give lectures for the members of Commercial and Industrial Chamber in Sagamihara City where the OMHO is headquartered. We give lectures for them to understand depression and how to deal with depressed employees.

In addition, in order to support mental health measures of companies, a counseling desk is set up inside the Commercial and Industrial Chamber in Sagamihara City. The desk is by appointment only, and mental health workers respond to SOS from companies. In managers, almost question is “What should we do to create the environment with no depression?” and “Some employees cause depression and come to psychiatrist, but I want to listen to the second opinion.” Psychiatrists usually prescribe medicines for depressed patients. Since we collaborate psychiatrists, if problems such as multiple drugs are recognized, we serve the second opinion for decreasing medicines. Of course, we talk with the patient and main doctor about changing medicines.

Moreover, when oppressed employees took the leave of absence, we dispatched experts to the workplace and inquired about the factors of depression from themselves and workplace. We reported this to managers and have the opportunity to talk about how to return the workplace with themselves and managers. In some cases, clinical psychologists may treat the cognitive behavioral therapy. The characteristic of the OMHO is aiming at “early return to work”. In the past, some employees returned after 1 interview. On average, employees returned after 3 interviews. For employees who are staying at home due to depression for a long time, experts from the OMHO supports accompanying going out. In a resent example, we supported an employee who was staying at home with going out to Enoshima, Kanagawa Prefecture. He said that

he felt the stimuli which can't recognize at home and it was the good opportunity to go out. For women, female experts treat.

### **3. Aiming at the transferring systems of small and mid-sized enterprises**

On the other hand, according to experts of industrial mental health, many employees were diagnosed to "depression" when taking the leaves of absence, but empirically, 70 or 80% of them are not depression but "adjustment disorder". If we change the environment of their workplace and working contents, there is a possibility overcoming depression or adjustment disorder without relying on psychiatry or medicine. According to social insurance labor who are in charge of many enterprises and works in Sagamihara City, it is not uncommon that a worker, who retired due to depression in a company, vigorously works another company.

In response to these circumstances, we currently consider personnel exchanges among member companies. If there are many problems in the workplace and there are workers who can't work sufficiently, we asked to them to dispatch to other member companies. And if they go well in the other company, we will serve the system to be transferred. With these efforts, we hope to reduce the number of employees who depressed. Of course such efforts have many difficulties, but we believe that these are important since nowadays small and mid-sized enterprises are suffering from serious shortage of employees. I heard that this transferring system is the first measure in Japan. What is necessary for promoting personnel exchanging and transferring of member companies is cooperation between one managers and other member managers and deepening understanding mental health. At the same time as regular study sessions, we plan to focus on constructing frequent information system to build strong relationship of member companies.

### **4. Conclusions**

Currently, we the OMHO promote "halving the number of employees who suffered depression in workplaces of small and mid-sized enterprises in Sagamihara City and nearby municipalities", and plan to analyze the reducing number of employees who were suffered from depression in workplaces in Sagamihara City quantitatively. As mentioned, for small and mid-sized enterprises, increasing depressed employees is fatal problem since small and mid-sized enterprises are few employees and then rolls per person are relatively large. So if one employee suffered from depression and took a

leave of absence, other employees deal with his working and then there is an increasing possibility of suffering from depression of other employees. We the OMHO hope that oppressed people reduce as less as possible.