

## **ADHD in the Workplace**

By Holly Bonnicksen-Jones, SPHR, HR Director, MRA

More and more adults are being diagnosed with Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder, also known as ADHD, and it is an increasingly common condition that HR professionals face in the workplace. ADHD is a neurobiological disorder affecting up to 5% of all Americans and it usually diagnosed in childhood, continuing into adulthood. Many individuals aren't diagnosed until adulthood where they have sought out help from their health care provider typically as a result of workplace performance problems.

The most often cited ADHD characteristics are impulsivity, inattention, and over-activity. Each individual with ADHD may exhibit one or more or any combination of these symptoms. Behaviors that are associated with these characteristics are: fidgeting; talking excessively; interrupting others; impatience; distractibility; organization problems; problems giving attention to details; procrastination; and problems following through with instructions.

Although the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) does not cover specific conditions in its language, it does speak to disabilities being those conditions that impair one or more major life functions. There are a number of court cases where ADHD symptoms have been identified as impairing a major life function, such as the ability to perform cognitive functions as cited in *Brown v. Cox Medical Centers*, 286 F.3d 1040 (8th Cir. 2002) and concentrating and remembering in *Gagliardo v. Connaught Laboratories, Inc.*, 311 F.3d 565 (3d Cir. 2002). Both ADA and the Wisconsin Fair Employment Act (WFEA) require employers to provide persons with disabilities reasonable accommodations. Depending upon the severity of the behavior(s) exhibited, coworkers and managers may or may not be aware that an individual even has ADHD. Many employees with ADHD have high-performing careers and need no accommodations to be successful and others may need one or more accommodations to be successful.

If an employee has either identified him or herself as requiring an accommodation due to ADHD or you believe that the employee struggles in his or her position due to an above-mentioned behavior, you should begin the process of working with that individual to identify potential accommodations. The employee, health care providers, and the Job Accommodation Network (a free government service) may be able to identify potential accommodations.

The following is a list of accommodations that have proven successful for other individuals with ADHD: encouraging the employee to take notes and write down assignments; providing weekly meetings to go over assignments and changing priorities; giving deadlines; breaking up large assignments into smaller tasks; providing flow charts detailing the steps required in a task; reducing auditory distractions by allowing the use of a headset or a white noise machine; relocating the employee to a lower traffic area; reducing clutter in the employee's office space; providing sensitivity training (disability awareness) to all employees; and providing structured breaks to create an outlet for physical activity.

By providing understanding, and possibly accommodations, your employees with ADHD or ADD can provide your organization with a high level of productivity and can lead happier, more fulfilling careers and personal lives.