

## Chapter 5: Perception and emotions

### OB in focus

#### *Anxiety and stress in the workplace*

It is well-established that depression is associated with a significant burden of illness and immense costs to organizations. However, anxiety disorders are more common and responsible for at least as much personal suffering, disability and economic loss. Anxiety disorders encompass six main categories: phobias, panic disorder with or without agoraphobia, generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, acute stress disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. One in four individuals suffers an anxiety disorder sometime in their life and one in 10 is likely to have had an anxiety disorder in the past 12 months.

Workplace stress occurs when we perceive the challenges and demands of work as excessive and don't think we can cope. Anxiety in the workplace is associated with: elevated fatigue; exhaustion; increased stress; irritability; attention or concentration problems; increased worrying and anxious thoughts; emotional and physical symptoms such as moodiness, agitation, restlessness, irritability; muscle tension; abdominal distress; feeling isolated; decreased well-being; as well as behavioural symptoms such as changes in appetite and sleep and nervous habits such as nail biting or pacing.

In order to promote a healthy workplace, employers need to recognize factors contributing to work-related stress and anxiety. Effective managers could provide workshops on various health-related topics, including stress reduction. Attention to individual needs such as role definition, flexible work hours, learning opportunities, advancement and regular feedback on job performance are also essential elements of a healthy workplace.

**Source:** Extract from 'High cost of anxiety' by Katy Kamkar, psychologist with the Work, Stress and Health Programme at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Toronto, *Canadian HR Reporter*, December 15, 2008, p.34.

