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Making Self-Care an Investment in Better WorkForce Health and Productivity



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“A healthy workforce is vital to a country’s competitiveness and productivity.”

World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report 2016–2017

On any given day, millions of workers around the world suffer from common, self-treatable health conditions that prevent them from performing their jobs and being fully productive while at work. Studies have shown reducing this functional impairment or “presenteeism” and regaining workforce productivity **can generate savings of USD 250-296 billion.**¹

Up to USD 296 billion in savings from regained workforce productivity

In this light, it is important for employers to understand how common health conditions such as allergy, cough/ cold, pain, and heartburn/ gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) can impact workforce productivity. Many of these common health conditions can be appropriately managed with over-the-counter (OTC) solutions.

This paper looks at the global impact of such conditions on workforce productivity and explores how enabling responsible self-care can benefit employees, employers and society as a whole.

Introduction

In 2015, the Institute for Health and Productivity Management (IHPM) released a white paper entitled “The Case for Self-Care and Over-the-Counter Medicines: Value-Add to Health Care and Productivity for Employees and Employers.” This highlighted the positive impact of self-care on workplace productivity within the United States and outlined the possible savings to be generated from reducing unnecessary healthcare spending¹.

This white paper reviews the same issue from a worldwide perspective, taking into account the available literature concerning the benefits of self-care for healthcare systems and workplace productivity. The broadened scope of this paper allows for regional as well as global assessments of how self-treatment of common, often chronic health conditions reduce unnecessary medical costs and improve work productivity and functionality.

The paper reinforces conclusions reached in a 2017 study conducted by IHPM featuring major American and European employers²:

- **Self-care and self-management of personal health and chronic medical conditions should be a foundation of sustainable, affordable, accessible, and consumer-focused health systems.**
- **Greater consumer responsibility for health and healthcare is a growing global trend.**
- **Employers have an increased role to play in improving and maintaining their workforce’s health, by adopting workplace policies that enable and encourage self-care.**



Four important policy recommendations emerged from this research:

- **Self-care, including the appropriate use of non-prescription or over-the-counter (OTC) medicines, should be an integral part of employers’ health, wellness and prevention models.**
- **Promoting health, implementing disease prevention strategies and expanding OTC options for a wider selection of conditions can improve job performance and productivity.**
- **As consumers, employees need access to reliable information and appropriate tools that enable them to practice responsible self-care.**
- **Greater collaboration among major stakeholders, including government, employers, employees, and medical professionals, is needed to support consumer choice regarding prevention of illness, responsible treatment and management of health conditions.**

Why self-care matters

*The World Health Organization (WHO) has defined self-care as
“... the ability of individuals to promote health, prevent disease, and
maintain health and to cope with illness and disability; it is a broad concept
encompassing nutrition, lifestyle and **self-medication**.”³*

Self-care and access to OTC solutions provide quick, safe and effective relief from the symptoms of prevalent self-treatable chronic conditions, which have a negative impact on quality of life and job performance for millions of workers. The practice of responsible self-care is a particularly cost-effective option at a time when global healthcare costs are rising due to ageing populations suffering from chronic illnesses.

Today, consumers are more informed than ever about their own health and are more likely to embrace an active role in practicing self-care.

Priorities for reducing presenteeism and productivity loss with self-care

The burden of common, self-treatable conditions extends beyond healthcare costs. There are several socioeconomic ramifications when consumers fail to practice adequate self-care. A meta-analysis of global evidence for the economic value of self-care using non-prescription medicines, reported in the *Journal of Medical Economics* (2017)⁴, states that self-care reduces patient burden by eliminating unnecessary trips to doctors' offices and improving quality-of-life and productivity thanks to instant symptom relief.

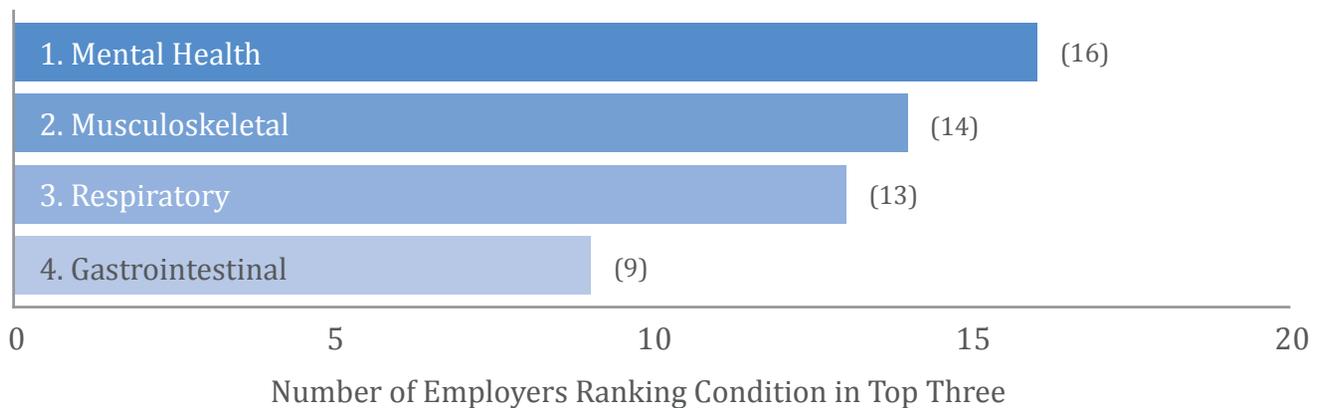
The Center for Workforce Health and Performance (CWHP) estimates that the net lost productivity cost of allergies, chronic neck and back pain, heartburn or GERD, chronic pain, and irritable bowel amounts to USD 156.7 billion⁵. Enabling employees to practice self-care for such conditions can significantly reduce the cost burden on employers.

Altogether,

Condition/symptom	Net Lost Workdays	Net Lost Productivity Cost	Total
Allergies/hay fever	130.9 million	USD 44.9 billion	USD 156.7 billion
Chronic back/neck pain	128.1 million	USD 42.4 billion	
Heartburn/GERD	92.6 million	USD 30.5 billion	
Chronic pain	60.6 million	USD 20.0 billion	
Irritable bowel	56.7 million	USD 18.9 billion	

The productivity losses attributable to self-treatable conditions result mostly from increasing presenteeism — i.e. where employees come to work functionally impaired by health problems, not fully fit to work and, consequently, less productive than usual. IHPM’s survey⁶ of 35 large companies employing 1.2 million workers revealed that the leading reasons for presenteeism were:

Leading Reported Health Reasons for Presenteeism



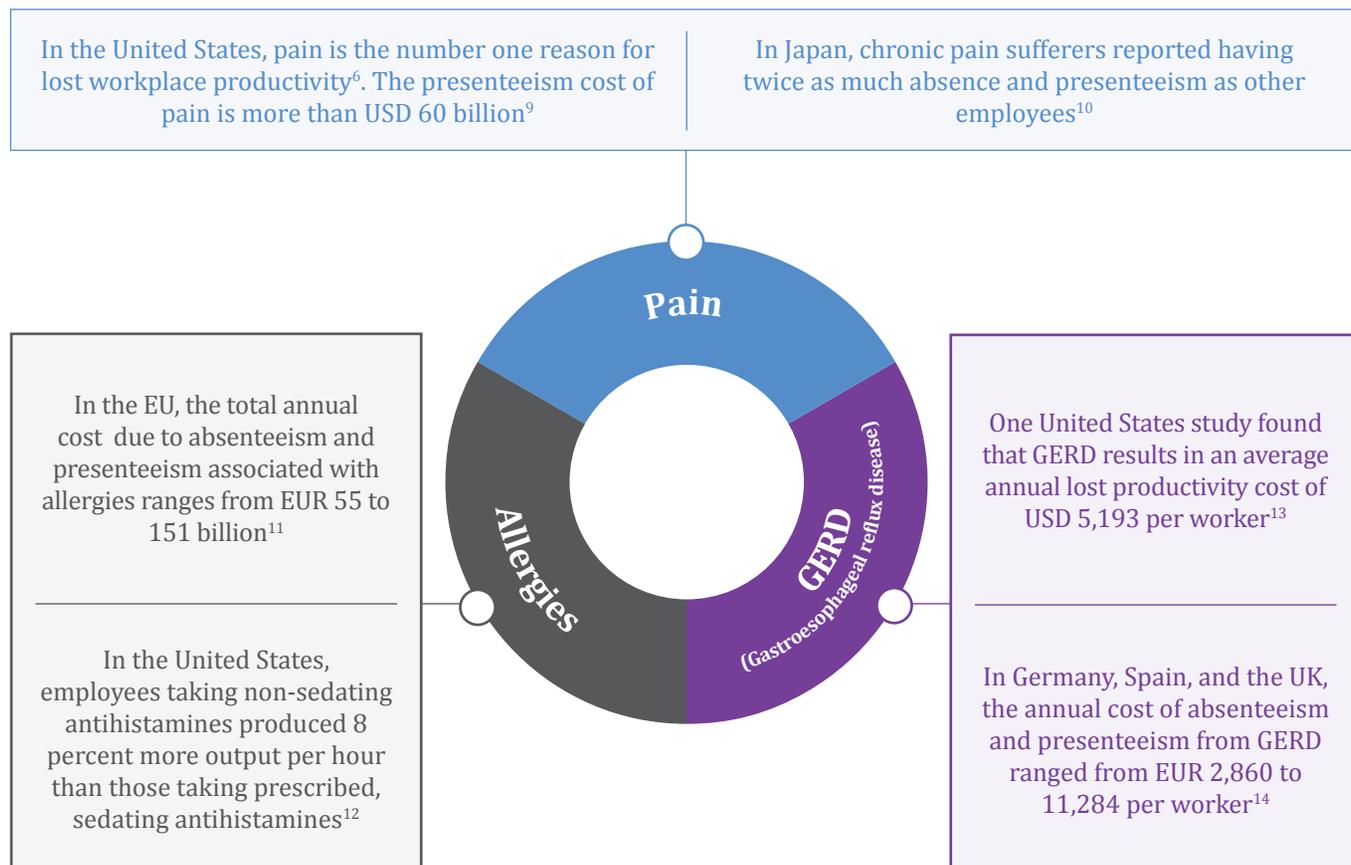
- mental health issues** – chiefly depression;
- musculoskeletal pain** – low back, arthritis and repetitive motion strain;
- respiratory problems** – allergies first and foremost;
- gastrointestinal problems** – heartburn, GERD and irritable bowel;

Excluding mental health, these conditions often can be self-managed by employees with the appropriate use of OTC medicines.

Findings below from a study of four companies in Japan⁷ highlighted the financial impact of prevalent self-treatable conditions with regard to presenteeism and lost productivity, ranked by annual monetary cost per worker:

Neck and shoulder pain	USD 22,516	<p>The annual cost of presenteeism can go up to USD 22,516 per worker for some conditions, such as neck and shoulder pain</p>
Back pain	USD 13,728	
Joint pain in arms & legs	USD 7,072	
Irritable bowel	USD 4,368	
Cold/flu	USD 1,820	
GI/heartburn	USD 1,352	
Allergies	USD 1,196	

The literature suggests that the three main disease areas that are at the source of productivity loss are allergies, pain, and gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). **In a study conducted within Lockheed-Martin and published by the Harvard Business Review⁸, allergies, low back pain and GERD were calculated to have collectively cost the company USD 3.25 million annually in lost productivity.**



Self-care can save money and increase productivity

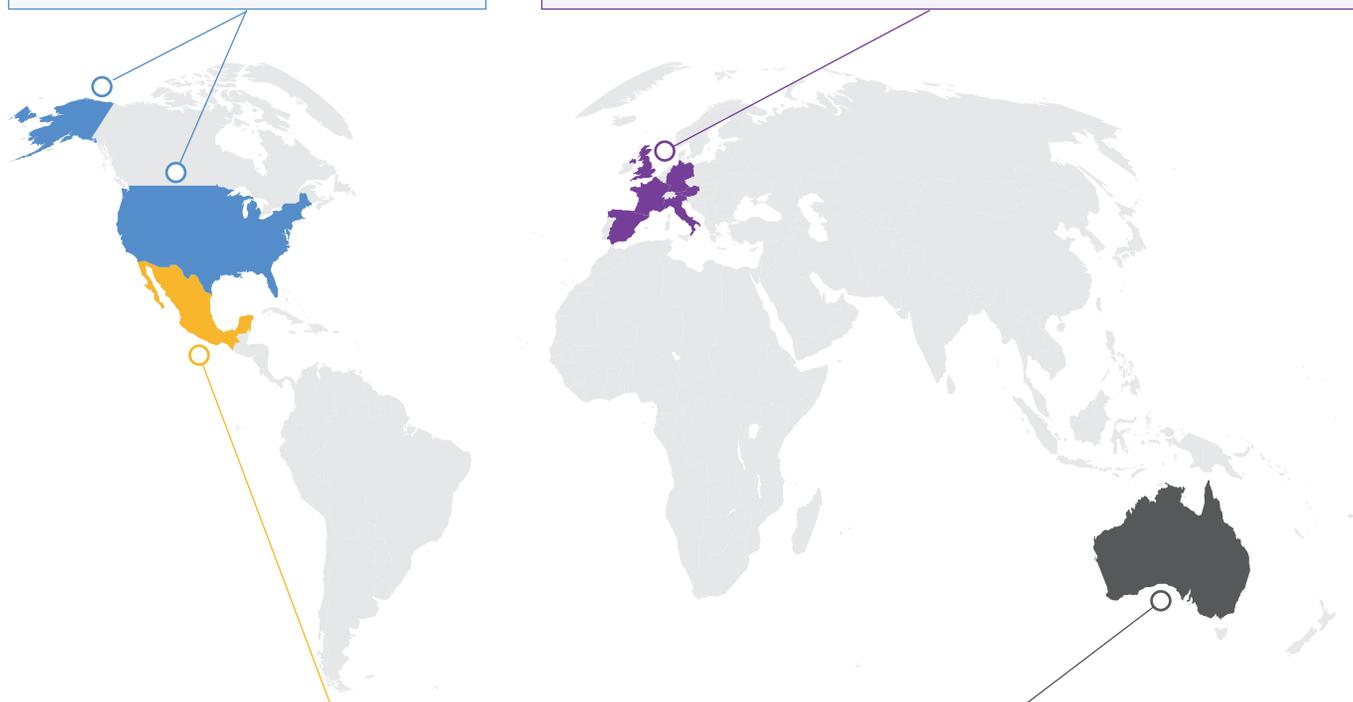
Self-treatable conditions are associated with significant direct and indirect costs and data from multiple countries suggests that there are cost savings to be achieved by relying more on non-prescription medicines. While the evidence is not always directly comparable due to differences in methodologies (e.g. some health economic studies do not calculate productivity loss from “presenteeism”), the overall picture suggests self-care can produce cost savings regardless of different geographies or healthcare systems.

USA

Relying on non-prescription medicines brings savings of USD 125-148 billion¹⁵

Europe

Switching from prescription to non-prescription medications in an additional 5 percent of cases would generate annual savings of more than EUR 16 billion¹⁶



Mexico

Potential savings of USD 7.50 in healthcare expenditures could be realized for every USD 1.0 spent on OTC medicines across five leading categories of common conditions. Using OTC products to treat these conditions would avoid lost time spent on physician visits, with potential productivity gains of USD 93 million¹⁸

Australia

Projected savings from future switches of 11 common prescription (Rx) medicines to OTC status would equate to AUD 2.1 billion – from 17 million fewer physician visits plus productivity gains from reducing lost work time to make those visits¹⁷

Data and map adapted from WSMI’s Infographic “What is the Economic Value of Self-Care”¹⁹

In Conclusion

Self-care, including access to appropriate OTC products for prevalent self-treatable ailments, should be the foundation of wellness, preventive health, and treatment of such ailments. With populations ageing and sedentary lifestyles increasing, the economic burden of chronic illness is set to consume a growing share of global GDP. Self-care will become critical for the financial sustainability of global healthcare systems.

Prioritizing self-care from a health policy standpoint aligns with the growing consumer preference for more personal control over their health. More than half of all consumers are employees, meaning that employers stand to benefit from the productivity gains enabled by a more fully-functional workforce.

Encouraging a new form of “triage” system that starts with educating individuals about the importance of self-care would improve both prevention and treatment, with added socioeconomic benefits of increased consumer wellbeing and employee productivity. Developing such a model requires integration with primary care and workplace occupational health, to optimize the usage of resources and deliver better healthcare and economic outcomes.

Employers have a crucial role to play in embedding self-care into workplace health and wellbeing programs. They can advocate for the wider adoption of self-care in these important ways:

- **Build acceptance of the role of self-care in health management and over-all wellness in the workplace**
- **Advocate for increased access to OTC therapies and use of technology for more conditions appropriate for self-care**
- **Empower consumers/employees with access to reliable information and quality tools to enable them to better manage their own health**

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Glossary of Terms

Chronic condition or illness: a disease with one or more of the following characteristics: (1) permanence; (2) leaving a residual disability; (3) caused by nonreversible pathological alteration; (4) requiring special training of the patient for rehabilitation; (5) may be expected to require a long period of supervision, observation or care.

Consumer: a person who purchases or seeks to purchase a non-prescription medicine.

Disease: a failure of the adaptive mechanisms of an organism to counteract adequately, normally or appropriately the stimuli and stresses to which the organism is subjected, resulting in a disturbance in the function or structure of some part of the organism. This definition emphasizes that disease is multifactorial, and may be prevented or treated by changing any one or a combination of the factors.

Health care professional: an individual accredited by a professional body for completing a course of study, and usually licensed by a government agency to practice a health-related profession such as physician, nurse, or pharmacist.

Lifestyle: identifiable patterns of behavior affecting an individual's health status, shaped by the interplay of personal characteristics, social interactions, and socioeconomic and environmental living conditions.

Medicine: A substance or combination of substances used to restore, correct or modify physiological function by exerting or producing a pharmacological, metabolic, or immunological influence or action. It is administered with the intention of treating or preventing disease, or making a medical diagnosis.

Non-prescription medicines: those medicines available directly to the consumer that can be obtained without a prescription from a health care professional.

OTC: "Over the Counter" medicines in the context of this paper are synonymous with non-prescription medicines.

Patient: a person receiving treatment from a healthcare professional.

Pharmacist: a health care professional qualified by education and authorized by law to dispense prescription-only medicines to consumers with a prescription from a physician, and to advise consumers on obtaining non-prescription medicines.

Physician: a healthcare professional qualified by education and authorized by law to practice medicine (In some countries the term means a specialist in internal medicine) – including writing prescriptions for medicines requiring them.

Prescription-only medicines (Rx): medicines that must be prescribed by a physician in order to be obtained by a consumer from a pharmacist.

Presenteeism: functional impairment while at work resulting from a health/disease-related issue and causing a loss of productivity that can be measured.

Prevention: individual behaviors to maintain health status, including self-treatment of common ailments that help to keep those health problems from becoming more serious illnesses, and enable the individual to continue performing daily activities of life including work.

Self-Care: actions taken by individuals to promote or maintain their health – or to prevent or treat common ailments – without the involvement of a health care professional.

Self-Medication: individual selection, procuring and use of non-prescription medicines to appropriately self-treat symptoms of common illnesses.

Switch: the process by which a medicine's legal classification within the scope of this paper is changed from prescription-only to non-prescription.

Wellness: the relative degree of freedom from lifestyle-related clinical health risk factors – such as blood pressure, blood sugar and obesity – that can be measured and controlled by the individual through change in lifestyle behavior.

This paper is the product of a literature review of published articles and studies on the total direct financial and “indirect” economic cost impact – including lost work productivity – of self-treatable conditions at international and regional levels.

About Institute for Health and Productivity Management (IHPM) and WorkPlace Wellness Alliance (WPWA) | Advancing Health and Performance Globally

IHPM |WPWA is a non-profit enterprise devoted to establishing the value of employee health as a global business asset. The idea at the center of all the Institute’s work is that employees are human capital, and their health, wellbeing, and productivity impact the success of companies and nations. IHPM provides data analyses, measurement tools, and HPM services and consultation to its members and clients in the United States, Latin America, Europe, Middle East and Asia.

The Institute helps employers identify the cost impact of employee health on business performance, implement the best programs to improve both health and productivity, and measure the success of their efforts.

The Institute is a unique driving force for changing health from a medical cost to a business asset for employers and nations. This unique status was acknowledged by the World Economic Forum when it chose IHPM to assume the leadership of its global Work Place Wellness Alliance – a group of multinational companies focused on transforming workplaces into environments that promote and sustain optimal health, wellbeing and performance..

About Sanofi

Sanofi is dedicated to supporting people through their health challenges. We are a global biopharmaceutical company focused on human health. We prevent illness with vaccines, provide innovative treatments to fight pain and ease suffering. We stand by the few who suffer from rare diseases and the millions with long-term chronic conditions.

With more than 100,000 people in 100 countries, Sanofi is transforming scientific innovation into healthcare solutions around the globe.

The Global Consumer Healthcare Business Unit had sales of EUR 4.8 bn in 2017. Sanofi Consumer Healthcare is one of the top three organisations in the Consumer Healthcare market and provides consumer centric, innovative self-care solutions that are mainly tailored to four global categories: Cough & Cold and Allergy, Pain, Digestive Health and Nutritional Health.