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### **Scheffer supports new study on mental health issues costing billions**

WICHITA, KS. – Major mental disorders cost the nation at least \$193 billion annually in lost earnings alone. Those are the findings of a new study featured in the May 2008 issue of the “American Journal of Psychiatry,” funded by the National Institute of Mental (NIMH). **Russell Scheffer**, MD, chair and professor, Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, at the University of Kansas School of Medicine-Wichita called the study a wake-up for communities across the country to recognize the enormous financial impact mental health issues create.

The conditions, according to Scheffer, are treatable and could dramatically improve the community if patients could get good care. He said hiring more staff, expanding training, and using new models of care can all be added to improve the situation.

“We know in the end treating psychiatric problems makes things better,” Scheffer said. “Our efforts in teaching, research, community service, and clinical care can play a big role; however, we need to help businesses understand how the loss of productivity from a mental illness can affect their bottom line.”

In Wichita and Sedgwick County, Scheffer said, the costs to business are enormous. “Not only with the direct costs of care but an underproductive workforce makes companies suffer as well.”

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Direct costs associated with mental disorders such as medication, clinic visits, and hospitalization, are relatively easy to quantify, but they reveal only a small portion of the economic burden these illnesses place on society, according to the study. Indirect costs such as lost earnings are likely to account for enormous expenses, but they are difficult to define and estimate. Using data from 4,982 respondents, researchers calculated total earnings lost in the year prior to the survey among people with serious mental illness (SMI).

The researchers attributed about 75 percent of the \$193 billion total to the reduced income that people with SMI likely earn, while 25 percent is attributed to the increased likelihood that people with SMI would have no earnings. Eighty-six percent of respondents reported earning income in the previous year. But those with SMI reported earning significantly less -- around \$22,545 -- than respondents without SMI, who averaged \$38,852. Although men with SMI took a greater hit in earnings than women with SMI, men still earned more overall than women with and without SMI.

In conclusion, researchers recommended that future studies on the effectiveness of treatments should consider measuring employment status and earnings over the long term to document the effects of mental disorders on a person's functioning and ability to remain productive.

The University of Kansas School of Medicine-Wichita is nationally recognized as a pioneer in community-oriented medical education. Since the first class graduated in 1975, 1,553 physicians have earned medical degrees. About half of these eventually established practices in the state, fulfilling KUSM-W's promise of "Educating Doctors For Kansas."

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