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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Free workbook's common sense approach helps depression sufferers cope better with work, life** *Simple but effective tool teaches "skills for life"*

You are a motivated and hard-working employee who is keen, always brings ideas to the table, and gives 100 per cent. Then, over a period of time and possibly in response to work- and/or life-related stresses, you find your *modus operandi* has changed: you are fatigued; snapping at other employees; having trouble sleeping; maybe even making mistakes. Colleagues don't recognize you, and you cease to recognize yourself.

You seek help, are diagnosed with depression but told medication is the most direct treatment and you're not sure you want to go that route. So what do you do?

Evidence-based research has proven that learning how to cope better with workplace issues and life in general can aid recovery from, if not avert, depression. And now, a new tool to help walk you through it with care and sensitivity is available for free, courtesy of the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA).

Antidepressant Skills at Work, a made-in-BC, user-friendly workbook, has been specifically designed to help people affected by depression in the workplace, whether the depression is a cause or effect of workplace issues. Possibly the only existing workplace depression self-care guide of its kind, Antidepressant Skills at Work teaches "antidepressant skills" based on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) whose effectiveness is well-established in the treatment of mild-to-moderate depression.

Antidepressant skills are "life skills" that could benefit anyone dealing with the stress and challenges inherent in life and work. Some of these skills help employees suffering from depression cope with and resolve workplace issues and challenges.

The emphasis of Antidepressant Skills at Work is on three steps:

- Solving problems effectively – learning how to identify and tackle workplace problems with effective solutions;
- Realistic thinking – identifying and changing distorted, depressive thinking (such as mind-reading and fortune-telling) that make work and life situations worse;
- Reactivating your life – setting specific and achievable goals to improve the quality of life at work and home.

The first section, Solving Problems Effectively, shows readers how to identify a problem, write down three actions to solve it, compare the actions, choose the best one, initiate an action plan, evaluate the result, and move on. It distinguishes between passive, aggressive and assertive actions and shows how the assertive approach will almost always produce a better outcome than the other two.

The section on Realistic Thinking depicts a not uncommon scenario where an individual is upset because his manager cancelled a meeting about an important project. The workbook illustrates a range of negative, depressive thoughts the employee may be thinking, such as: "He must be hearing bad things about my work – he probably thinks I'm incompetent"

“He must be hearing bad things about my work – he probably thinks I’m incompetent” (mind-reading); to “I’ll never get a promotion, no matter how hard I work” (catastrophizing).

The workbook then teaches readers how to challenge depressive thinking with more realistic thoughts such as: “I don’t know why he cancelled; maybe something urgent came up”; or “The evidence I have doesn’t fit this gloomy prediction. Just canceling this one meeting doesn’t tell me whether I am likely to get a promotion.”

The final section, *Reactivating Your Life*, helps readers plan out and commit to activities to help them reclaim their lives and create a work/life balance as they recover from depression. It also helps them deal with depression relapses.

“What makes this workbook especially effective is that readers literally have to write down these scenarios, problems and solutions and subject them to a common sense analysis. This, in turn, helps them change their thinking and enables them to map out an action plan and resolve issues where they need to be resolved,” said Dan Bilsker, PhD, clinical psychologist and one of the authors of *Antidepressant Skills at Work*.

“PHSA is uniquely placed to help BC businesses by facilitating this invaluable tool as it’s the only health authority in the country responsible for specialized health services on a province-wide basis,” said PHSA board chair Wynne Powell. “If I was referring to measles or mumps impacting the performance of businesses and personal lives, organizations would be jumping at the chance to obtain a tool to help reduce and prevent it. But, because it is depression, it’s perceived differently, even stigmatized.”

Over recent years, awareness of the connection between depression and the workplace has increased. Depression is associated with an enormous degree of disability and significant and emotional and financial cost to both employees and employers. More than four per cent of adults are depressed at any given time, and more than 15 per cent of adults will be depressed at some time in their lives.

*Antidepressant Skills at Work* was developed by BC Mental Health and Addiction Services (BCM HAS), an agency of PHSA, in partnership with the Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addiction (CARMHA), faculty of health sciences, Simon Fraser University, and in consultation with a range of stakeholders.

*Antidepressant Skills at Work* can be downloaded for free at the BCM HAS website, [www.bcmhas.ca/research](http://www.bcmhas.ca/research). It is also available through CARMHA, [www.carmha.ca/publications](http://www.carmha.ca/publications).

PHSA plans, manages and evaluates selected specialty and province-wide health care services across BC, working with the five geographic health authorities to deliver province-wide solutions that improve the health of British Columbians.

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