

Business Review: What impact do alcohol and drugs have on your organization?

by Rupert Wolfe- Murray



Dr **Mike McCann** MD is an occupational health physician with many years experience of advising companies, and public institutions, in UK and South Africa. He is also on the board of directors of [Castle Craig rehab clinic](#) in Scotland.

What is the role of an Occupational Health Physician?

It is a balance between caring for the employees and advising management on how to manage difficult medical problems. Alcohol and drug problems are probably the worst problems a manager has to face.

How did you get involved in the field of Substance Abuse?

When I worked in South Africa as an occupational physician I saw the problem was immense. You just had to get involved. In former Communist countries like Romania there tends to be similar levels of substance abuse, particularly alcohol, but less availability of addiction treatment services.

Tell me about your new book '[Alcohol, Drugs & Employment](#)'

I believe it is a unique reference book for HR professionals, managers, employment lawyers and occupational health professionals. The book describes policies for identifying, controlling and treating substance abuse at work. Every company should do a risk assessment of the potential damage that alcohol and drug abuse can cause. It is based on case studies in South Africa and Canada and it is being sold in UK. It is relevant in emerging economy like Romania's.

Is alcohol and drug addiction in the workplace a growing problem?

I don't believe the problem is getting any worse but there are "cultures" in certain companies where alcohol and drug abuse are tolerated. Without doubt peer group pressure is a significant problem. The question is what impact is it having on the performance of the company? Only if management see it as a significant problem do they take action.

How can companies deal with drug and alcohol problems?

They must start by doing the risk assessment process to assess the extent of the problem. A

good starting point would be to look at the number of sickness absences and accidents. If they can identify a significant problem — and work out how to improve efficiency by addressing it — then people will buy into it as an issue. I call this “treating the organization.” I suspect in Romania the issue of “addiction in the workplace” is something of a taboo subject among HR and medical professionals. It needs to be discussed if any progress is to be made.

How should Romanian employers go about introducing a substance-abuse policy?

For it to work effectively they need to start with a consultation process that involves all interested parties, particularly the unions and supervisors — all of whom will need to be educated about addiction. The company should ensure that addiction treatment is available, including a post rehabilitation program where people can return to work.

Do you have any advice for employers who think an employee is abusing drugs or alcohol at work?

Yes — develop a policy and leave it to the professionals. Time and again I have seen managers manipulated by an addicted employee — trying to sort them out over many years — until the manager ends up as the victim. Unfortunately there is a shortage of addiction treatment experts in many EU Member States, including Romania.

What treatment options would you recommend an employer looks at?

If the individual has a severe problem then I really believe the only treatment option is in-patient (residential) treatment. Out patient treatment can work well in less severe cases. Again, there is a lack of these services in Romania and the option of sending the patient abroad for treatment has to be considered as an option.

Dr McCann was interviewed in London for Business Review by Rupert Wolfe Murray, who is the [European Representative](#) of Castle Craig rehab clinic. A video of the interviewee is available here:

[A Guide for Managers: How to Deal with Alcohol and Drug Abuse in your Organisation.](#)

[Link to original article published on business-review.ro \(December 04, 2012\)](#)