

Workplace health programmes cut absenteeism by 20-30pc

By Guardian Reporter

MALARIA, other diseases and general poor health are major barriers to business efficiency and to national economic development due to staff absenteeism and health experts say can be reduced by up to 30 per cent through workplace health programmes.

Speaking to The Guardian over the weekend, sectoral expert Bhakti Shah who holds a Masters in Public Health (MPH) cited the World Economic Forum report that malaria is estimated to slow economic development by 1.3 per cent each year.

"It costs companies loss of productivity during absenteeism caused by malaria episodes amongst employees and their dependents and acute healthcare expenses," Shah said.

She pointed out other losses to include expenses related to deaths/burials of employees and their dependents, inefficiencies and additional human resource expenses for employing and training of new staff to compensate for absenteeism or employee loss due to malaria related causes.

Shah who is also the managing director at ImpactAfya Ltd., a Dar es Salaam corporate wellness clinic, maintained that implementing successful malaria workplace programmes can significantly help mitigate these business risks and cut costs.

"Studies after studies show that malaria prevention and control programmes instituted by companies show reduced absenteeism and reduced medical spending at company clinics or reduced health insurance claims," she said.

As an example of the effectiveness of workplace programmes, she cited the World

Health Organisation (WHO) Roll Back Malaria Report of 2011, which shows that three companies in Zambia - Mopani Copper Mines, Konkola Copper Mines and Zambia Sugar - decreased malaria cases and absenteeism by more than 90 per cent in a 10 year period.

"The report shows that malaria related spending reduced by more than 75 per cent and a very conservative estimate showed a 28 per cent gain of annualized internal return," she said.

Similarly, case studies in sub-Saharan Africa referenced in the John Hopkins Malaria Free Future project show that thanks to workplace interventions, for the 2011-2012 year, Kampala Pharmaceutical Industries reported a five per cent decrease in employee hours lost, a three per cent decrease in the costs spent in treating Malaria and a reduction in number of sick days from 52 days in 2011 to 40 days in 2012.

In Tanzania, Said Salim Bakhresa Group reports that malaria related expenses fell by two-thirds with an 80 per cent drop of malaria absences again thanks to workplace wellness programmes.

Similar results were reported by Tanzania Breweries where malaria cases amongst staff have seen a decrease from 881 to only 253 in the 2013 financial year.

"In addition to ill employees absences, parents may miss work to care for sick children, who are at particular risk for malaria infection and on average, three absent days are reported per malaria episode and even when staff return to work, it takes a few days for the staff to be optimally productivity," Shah summed up.

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