

**EASNA CONFERENCE: 'Business Solutions to the Human Condition'  
MENTAL HEALTH IN THE ERA OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE**

*Workplace mental health pioneer, Bill Wilkerson, LL. D. (Hon) gives keynote address to the Annual Conference of the Employee Assistance Society of North America, New Orleans, Louisiana, May 9, 2019*

***"The world is crossing an historic bridge spanning human and artificial intelligence and the result is a meeting of two minds – one human, one not. Can we keep them both healthy? That is unclear."***

Artificial intelligence represents a "clear and present" danger to the livelihood and wellbeing of more than 375 million jobholders and the families they support" if AI unfolds in the workplace as forecast.

"If artificial intelligence blows like a blizzard or drops like a bomb on the workplace as a transition to a brain-based, digital economy accelerates, the most significant unintended consequence of this revolution will be to increase the burden of human distress, disquiet and clinical disorder across the world."

These are among the conclusions of a six-month analysis of 'mental health in the era of artificial intelligence' authored by Bill Wilkerson, Executive Chairman, Mental Health International, a business executive and eight time award-winning workplace mental health pioneer who has launched a series of business-led initiatives in the US, Canada and Europe over the past 20 years to promote and protect the mental health of working populations.

Aside from business, he has worked as a senior and chief executive and as a consultant in health benefits, the arts, broadcasting, law enforcement and government. Wilkerson holds an Honorary Doctorate of Laws from McMaster University in Canada for his work in mental health across national borders.

Wilkerson says EAP professionals should prepare themselves to help employers and employees prepare for the impact of artificial intelligence. "In my estimate, the acronym EAP, in this environment, might well include Education and Preparedness."

This, he says, is needed for re-training, new skills development, resilience training and the development and testing of protocols and standards with which employers set out the values that will guide their use and implementation of AI in any form, assess the risk to employers and steps needed to mitigate those risks. EAP professionals are well-placed for this work.

Wilkerson's remarks are based on a major report he has written on "Mental Health in the Era of Artificial Intelligence. He says, "the deep learning of machines poses risk of deep stress for people who face the invasive uncertainty and disruption caused by AI technologies displacing or replacing them."

This, at a time when working populations are already 20% symptomatic of mental illness in any given year and 50% across their lifetime. The scale of the AI revolution demands a sophisticated, well-funded and techno-savvy re-training and skills development campaign by governments, businesses, AI technology designers and users.

Wilkerson says that while the introduction of technology at any time in history has been consistently decried as "the work of the devil, so to speak, this is the first time that technology – through AI and in the field of genomics, synthetic biology – is moving toward the replication of human capacity and a re-statement of the human experience in these fundamental terms. So this is different."

The World Economic Forum, in its global jobs report on AI, adds this: "In a world where activities and decisions once undertaken exclusively by human beings will be replaced or augmented by artificial intelligence, profound question arise as to what it means to be human."

Wilkerson notes: "One thing it means to be human in the era of artificial intelligence is living with mental illness and the era's new pressures on the principal instrument of productive capacity in a digital, brain-base economy: the human mind. In short, the human mind now does the heavy lifting for business and is at risk of being costly collateral damage."

In his report, Wilkerson braces the reader for the potential effects of AI on mental health and wellbeing by setting out the ne sciences and new hope for major strides toward improved understanding and management of mental disorders and see AI technology as an important tool in that process.

He also deals head-on with fundamental misunderstanding and misinformation as to what mental illness is and is not, and to that end, calls to action the employee assistance community to lead "new efforts to promote and protect mental health and the human identity of working populations in the workplace and in life."  
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