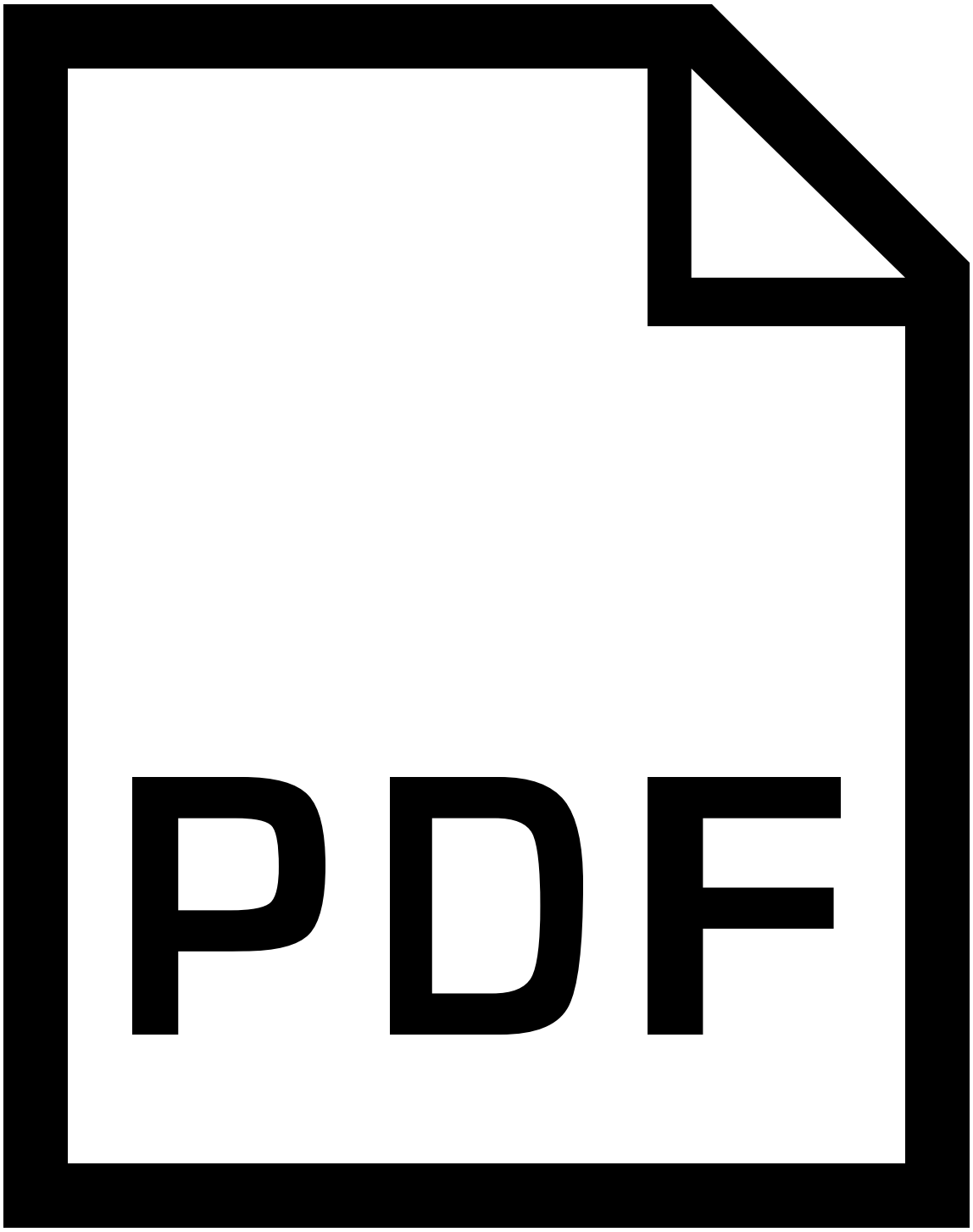
News Item, 09/07/2012, Gütersloh / Munich: Effective measures for improving therapy adherence could realize productivity gains in Germany of up to €20 billion

Joint healthcare study by the Bertelsmann Stiftung and the global management consulting firm Booz & Company



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Ansprechpartner

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Dr. Jan Böcken

Widespread chronic illnesses cost the German economy billions in lost productivity / Greatest losses from depression and chronic back pain / Businesses can benefit substantially from effective improvements in therapy for employees

Germany could produce up to €20 billion more in goods and services in 2012 if better treatment and support were available for employees with chronic illnesses. That is one of the key findings of "Productivity Gains From Improving Therapy Adherence," a study carried out by the Bertelsmann Stiftung and the global management consulting firm Booz & Company. According to the study, measures for improving therapy adherence and effectiveness would have to address both the lifestyles and behavior of those suffering from chronic conditions. Such measures would target when medicine is taken, nutritional needs, work habits and break times. Since Germany lacks such structured support, chronic illnesses currently lead to significant productivity losses, above all because of widespread conditions such as depression and back pain. The absenteeism and disability caused by these two conditions alone result in annual productivity losses of up to €21 and €26 billion, respectively, thereby significantly impacting employers' results.

Individualized therapy strategies as a key cost lever

According to the study, one of the major causes of lost productivity is that few proven programs exist to provide individualized, setting-specific therapeutic support. "Currently such programs are limited to generic preventive measures and methods of gradually returning employees to their jobs after they have been sick," says Peter Behner, partner and healthcare expert at Booz & Company. "The core problem, however, is that the therapeutic measures often have little to do with the employee's workplace."

The potential for achieving systemic improvement in this sector of the German economy is therefore immense, since of the country's workers between the ages of 16 and 65, 21.2 percent suffer from hypertension, 17 percent from chronic back pain, 8.5 percent from asthma, 5.2 percent from depression and 3.8 percent from rheumatoid arthritis. These figures highlight the study's main recommendation: that both employers and social security administrations be widely involved in developing effective therapeutic measures.

In addition to taking medicine as prescribed, long-term lifestyle changes often play a key role in improving the situation of those with chronic illnesses. "Patients have to be convinced that such a change is necessary and must work with their doctor to set up an individualized regimen of therapy. They can't be expected to face this challenge on their own," says Dr. Brigitte Mohn, member of the Bertelsmann Stiftung Executive Board. Other success factors include providing comprehensive information and coaching programs for patients and establishing specialized networks so that patients can exchange experiences with others suffering from the same condition. In addition to health payors and businesses, policymakers must also do their part to address these issues, which are not limited to acute care. "In order to realize the existing potential for both individual patients and the overall economy, it is urgent that policymakers take an interdisciplinary approach and collaborate with the business community, unions and the relevant actors in the healthcare sector," Mohn says.

The study's final conclusion is that if policymakers, businesses and civil society successfully work together to optimize therapy adherence and effectiveness, it will not only improve recovery rates for the chronically ill, it will also improve Germany's structural competitiveness as well as its attractiveness as a place to do business.

About the Bertelsmann Stiftung

The Bertelsmann Stiftung is dedicated to serving the common good. It executes projects in its four core areas of education, business and social affairs, health, and international relations, and strives to promote peaceful coexistence among the world's diverse cultures. Through the example of its civic engagement, it wants to encourage others to support their own communities as well. Founded in 1977 as a registered charity, the Bertelsmann Stiftung is majority shareholder of Bertelsmann AG. Structured as a private operating foundation, it is politically nonpartisan and works independently of Bertelsmann AG.

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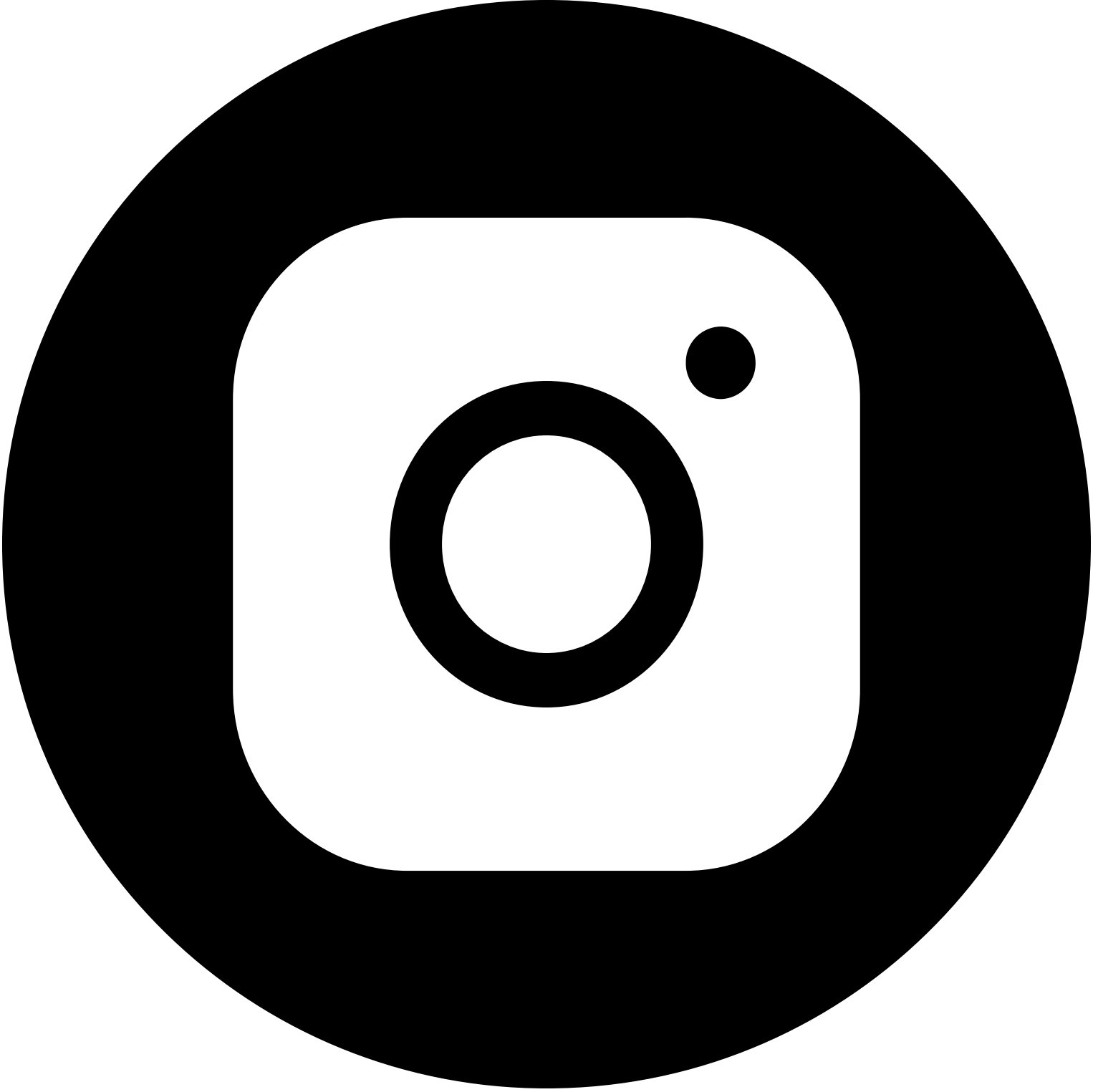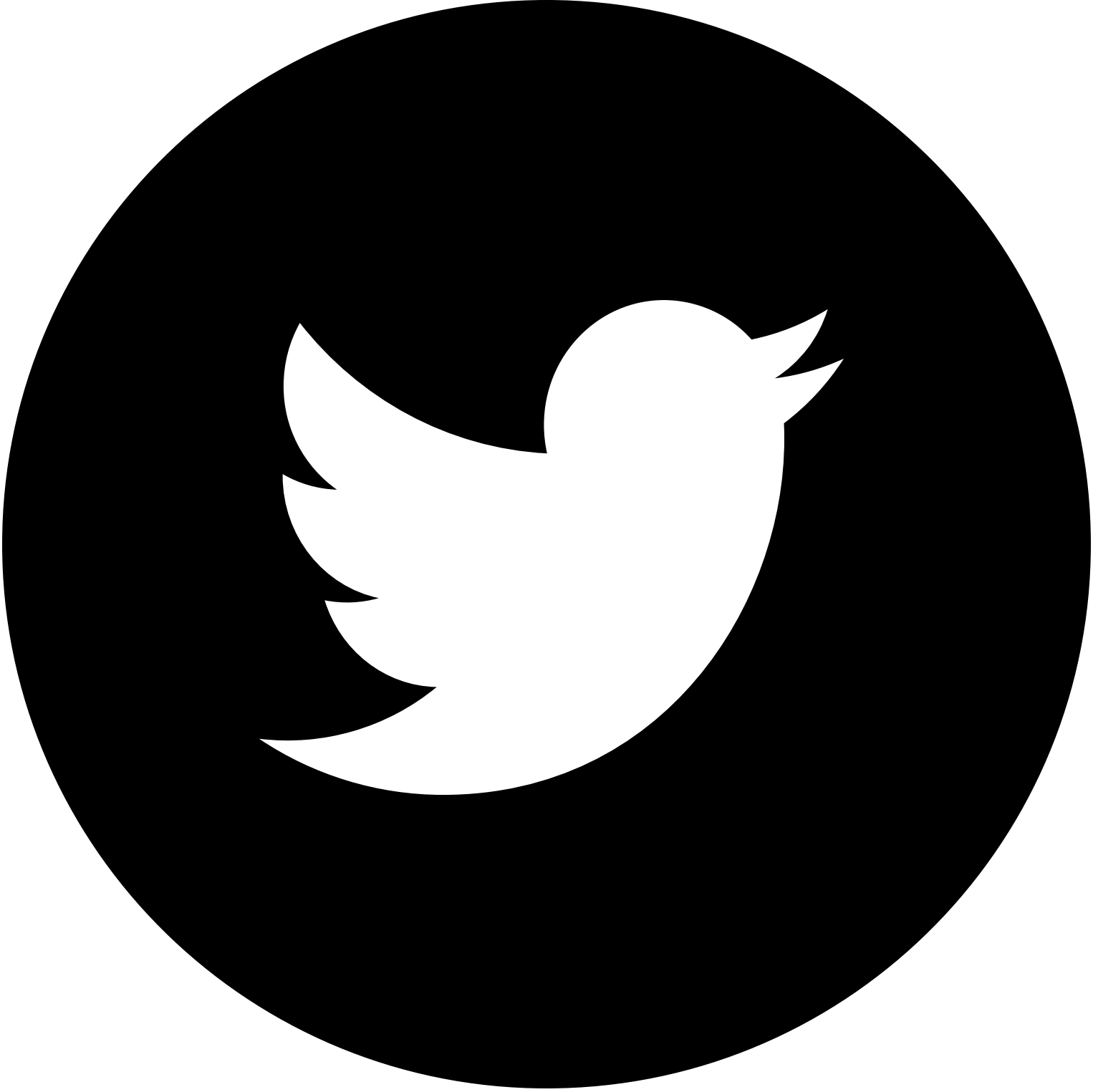
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