

# **BHF Think fit! Think well!**

## **Making the case for workplace mental wellbeing**

This document contains information to help convince management of the importance of and need for action to promote workplace mental wellbeing.

**“Mental health is now the biggest occupational health problem in the UK, accounting for more working days lost than musculoskeletal problems.”<sup>1</sup>**

**“The cost of mental ill-health to business [in Britain] is as much as £9 billion in salary with a further unknown cost in terms of lost time and productivity.”<sup>2</sup>**

**Stress-related conditions and musculoskeletal disorders are now the commonest reported causes of work-related sickness absence.<sup>3</sup>**

**A number of risk factors have been identified as being related to sickness absence, including overall health, job satisfaction and adverse social circumstances.<sup>4</sup>**

**The promotion of a healthy workplace helps companies to increase their productivity and to become more competitive.<sup>5</sup>**

**Looking after mental wellbeing at work can improve the health of your workforce ... and the health of your business.**

## How promoting workplace mental wellbeing can help benefit your business

Looking after mental wellbeing contributes to the health of your business through:

- increasing productivity
- improving absenteeism and ability to return to work after illness
- retaining staff
- improving workability among older employees
- reducing workplace injuries
- creating a positive corporate image
- improving the morale and health of the workforce, and
- helping your business achieve Health at Work awards. (See [bhf.org.uk/thinkfit](http://bhf.org.uk/thinkfit) for more information on these awards.)

Ill health – both mental ill health and physical ill health – is known to cost businesses through:

- cost of absenteeism and long-term sick pay
- cost of temporary staff
- loss of production
- retention of staff, staff turnover, and costs of recruitment, induction and training
- early retirement
- indirect cost to management time
- complaints and litigation.
- Ill health may also contribute to low morale, decreased job satisfaction and industrial injuries.
- Staff illness and shortages can threaten the quality of service or product supplied.<sup>6</sup>

Organisations need to promote and protect the mental wellbeing of their workforce, as much research demonstrates the importance of mental wellbeing to physical health, social wellbeing and productivity.<sup>7-9</sup>

As well as poor mental health being a cause of absence from work, it also contributes to physical ill health, which in turn can lead to sickness absence. Mental health and stress are associated with many of the leading causes of disease and disability in our society including:

- diabetes
- respiratory diseases
- infections
- obesity
- increased levels of substance abuse
- high blood pressure
- blood clotting
- low immunity
- coronary heart disease (because of an increase in risk factors such as smoking, cholesterol metabolism and low levels of physical activity).<sup>10, 11</sup>

### Economic benefits

- The CBI has estimated that, based on a working year of 228 days, 3% (6.8 days per year) are lost due to absence, and 36% of absences are caused by stress, anxiety and depression.<sup>12</sup> This means that 2.5 days absence per person per year are caused by the most common mental ill-health problems. In a labour force with 31.9 million employees, that amounts to approximately 80 million working days.

- Based on an average salary as provided by Labour Force Statistics for full-time workers,<sup>13</sup> this would equate to £9 billion a year lost to sickness absence caused by stress – solely in terms of paid out salary.
- In 2004, the average reported cost of sickness absence was £588 per employee per year.<sup>14</sup>
- A large proportion (40%) of time lost at work is accounted for by long-term absence of 20 days or more.<sup>4</sup> Stress is the leading cause of long-term absence among non-manual workers.<sup>14</sup>
- Stress-related illness costs UK employers between £3.75 billion and £7 billion per year.<sup>6, 15, 16</sup>
- An estimated 13.4 million days were lost in 2001/02 through stress, depression or anxiety caused or made worse by work. This equates to an average of 29.2 days off work per sufferer, per year.<sup>17</sup>
- The total cost of mental health problems in England is estimated at £77.4 billion.<sup>18</sup> These figures include the cost of provision of care, the cost of lost output, human costs, and loss to the economy through unemployment.
- By 2020, depression will be second only to chronic heart disease as an international health burden in terms of cause of death, disability, incapacity to work and the toll on medical resources.<sup>19</sup>

### **Becoming an employer of choice**

- You can show your staff that you are a good employer, by promoting mental wellbeing among all employees.
- You have the potential to reduce the human cost to individuals and their families of work-related mental health problems.
- Addressing mental health problems is good practice and an important element of the overall strategy of being an employer of choice.
- Employing people who have experienced mental health problems provides a larger pool of potential employees to draw from and demonstrates clear commitment to equal opportunities.
- Discrimination against people with mental health problems is wrong and illegal.
- People with disabilities make a huge contribution to the economy, for example as customers, service users, employees and business people. Treating them fairly makes good sense for business.

### **Complying with the law**

Employers have duties:

- under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, to assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities

- under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, to take measures to control that risk, and
- under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005.

Also, doing a proper risk assessment for stress can help you avoid prosecution and litigation.

#### *Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999*

This requires employers to assess the nature and scale of risks to health in the workplace and put adequate control measures in place. You have a 'duty of care' which includes the mental health of your workforce, and this is significant in the context of rapidly rising levels of workplace stress, which is often the first step towards developing more serious mental health problems.

Risk assessment includes identifying hazards, including those with the potential to harm mental health, and evaluating the risks involved.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Health and Safety at Work Act 1974*

Under this Act, employers have a duty to ensure, as far as possible, the health, safety and welfare at work of all their employees including:

*"The provision and maintenance of a working environment for his employees that is, so far as is reasonably practicable, safe, without risks to health, and adequate as regards facilities and arrangements for their welfare at work."*

This means there is a duty in law to make sure your employees are not made ill by their work, and the risks to health include risks to mental health.

#### *The Disability Discrimination Act 2005*

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) applies as much to people with mental ill health as it does to those with a physical disability. It is now illegal for organisations to fail to recognise the mental health needs of their staff. The DDA applies to all employment matters including recruitment, training, performance management, protection from harassment, promotion and dismissal. It is unlawful for employers to discriminate against a person with a disability by treating them less favourably than someone else.

Disability is defined as a 'physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.' The definition of 'disability' under the DDA applies to people with long-term mental health problems which have lasted or are likely to last up to 12 months.

Employers have a duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' that could assist a person with a disability to do a job, and these adjustments need to be considered for employees with mental health problems. People with mental health problems are not a homogenous group, and many will not need to have any adjustments made, especially if they are given control over how and when they do their job. The most important single adjustment needed in the workplace is often related to attitudes to and assumptions about mental health.

### **Why the workplace is important**

It is estimated that individuals may spend about 60% of their waking hours in their place of work.<sup>21</sup> For most of us, work has a positive effect on mental wellbeing. Since over half of the UK population is currently in employment, this means that, for the majority of individuals, the workplace offers a significant potential setting for mental health and stress management.

One in four people in the UK experience a mental health problem at any particular time.<sup>22</sup>

According to a survey of 2000 adults in the UK carried out by the Samaritans in 2007, 5 million people are 'extremely stressed' at work, and a third are taking to drink, compared with just over a fifth three years earlier. The survey found that a third of British workers said they could not sleep because of anxiety about work, and half a million people said work-related stress was making them physically ill.<sup>23</sup>

## How promoting workplace mental wellbeing can help benefit your employees

While there are many different causes of, and catalysts for, mental health problems, a positive working environment and appropriate support at work have a significant impact on stress-related sickness absence and long-term outcomes for employees experiencing mental distress.

"Employers have a key role to play in safeguarding the mental health of their workforce, both by providing a supportive working environment and by encouraging the use of the workplace to provide health education and health promotion activities."<sup>24</sup>

Many of the factors that influence the physical and mental health of staff relate to style of management and working culture.<sup>25-29</sup> For this reason, although individuals can take steps to promote their own mental wellbeing, mental health issues need to be addressed at an organisation-wide level rather than an individual level.<sup>27</sup>

- Having control over the work you do reduces the risks of sickness absence.<sup>25</sup>
- Having control over your job and decision-making at work protects mental health.<sup>25, 30, 31</sup>
- Having opportunities to make decisions about the work you do can reduce the risk of alcohol dependence, poor mental health, poor health and sickness absence.<sup>25, 30, 31</sup>
- Ensuring work demands are not too excessive is associated with improved mental health.<sup>26, 28, 32</sup>
- Secure employment status reduces the risk of mental health problems.<sup>33</sup>
- Reducing role conflict is related to reduced stress levels.<sup>29</sup>
- Clarity and consistency of information and emotional support can have a powerful positive effect on employee health and wellbeing.<sup>25</sup>
- Support at work is a protective factor particularly against job demands.<sup>34, 35</sup>
- People who experience less stress at work have better job satisfaction and productivity, and improved social life and health.<sup>36</sup>

### People with experience of mental health problems

- A third of people with mental health problems report having been dismissed or forced to resign from their job.<sup>37</sup>

- Research indicates that, given the chance of employment, people who have experience of mental health problems take less sick leave than average and demonstrate strong loyalty to their employer.<sup>38</sup>
- Fewer than four in ten employers say that they would consider employing someone with a history of mental health problems, compared to more than six in ten for someone with a physical disability.<sup>37</sup>
- Fifty-two per cent of people who have experienced mental health problems have concealed this fact from their employer for fear of losing their job. Mental ill health remains an area of fear and stigma for many.<sup>2</sup>
- In a survey carried out in 2000, 47% of people with mental health problems said they had experienced discrimination at work.<sup>39</sup>

## **Ill health at work**

### **Stress**

#### **Prevalence**

- Work-related stress, depression and anxiety is the second most common type of work-related illness.<sup>17</sup>
- In 2001/02, an estimated 5.6 million people believed they were suffering from stress, depression or anxiety that was caused or made worse by their current or past work.<sup>17</sup>
- People who are experiencing stress at work say that it is reducing their job satisfaction and their productivity, and damaging their social life and their health.<sup>36</sup>

#### **Cost**

- Stress-related illness costs UK employers between £3.75 billion and £7 billion per year.<sup>6, 12, 15</sup>
- The CBI has estimated that 36% of absences from work are caused by stress, anxiety and depression.<sup>12</sup> This is 2.5 days per person per year caused by the most common mental ill-health problems. In a labour force with 31.9 million employees, that amounts to approximately 80 million working days.
- Based on an average salary as provided by Labour Force Statistics for full-time workers, this would equate to £9 billion a year lost to sickness absence caused by stress – solely in terms of paid out salary.<sup>13</sup>

#### **How a workplace mental wellbeing policy can help**

- Undertaking a workplace assessment will help identify key stress ‘hot spots’ and point to ways of addressing these issues.
- A workplace mental wellbeing policy will identify ways to make improvements to minimise work-related stress.
- The most important causes of stress at work are time pressures (60%), work overload (54%), threat of job loss (52%), lack of consultation or communication (51%) and under-staffing (46%).<sup>40</sup> A workplace mental wellbeing policy will help tackle these issues.

## **Depression and anxiety**

### **Prevalence**

- An organisation with 1,000 employees can expect between 200 and 300 people to experience depression or anxiety in any year.<sup>22</sup>
- One in twenty adults are estimated to be experiencing depression at any one time, and it is the third leading cause of death among 15-24 year olds.<sup>41</sup>
- One in twenty workers suffers from a depressive illness, and 52% of them feel the need to conceal their illness for fear of losing their job.<sup>42</sup>
- A third of UK workers cannot get to sleep at night because of anxiety, and three-quarters cannot 'switch off' when they leave their office.<sup>23</sup>

### **Cost**

- By 2020, depression will be second only to chronic heart disease as an international health burden (in terms of cause of death, disability, incapacity to work and the toll on medical resources).<sup>43</sup>

### **How a workplace mental wellbeing policy can help**

- By developing a culture of openness and support towards mental health problems, people will feel safer about disclosing any mental health problem they have, and this may enable them to get the help they need early.
- Providing the support an employee with mental health problems needs at work will assist their recovery and may reduce the length of time they need to take off work.
- Raising employees' awareness about mental health issues will make them more supportive and less discriminating towards colleagues experiencing mental illness.

### **Coronary heart disease**

The short-term responses to stress include a range of effects including:

- physiological effects – such as high blood pressure
- behavioural effects – such as smoking, overeating or drinking alcohol as a form of coping.

High blood pressure, smoking, and an unhealthy diet are all risk factors for coronary heart disease.

### **Prevalence**

- Coronary heart disease is the most common cause of death overall in the UK. Around one in five men and one in six women die from the disease. Coronary heart disease causes around 101,000 deaths in the UK each year. It is also the most common cause of death in those of working age.<sup>44</sup>

### **Cost**

- The total estimated cost of coronary heart disease to the UK economy is at least £7 billion a year.<sup>44</sup>
- In 2003, production losses and informal care associated with coronary heart disease cost the UK economy over £3,100 million.<sup>44</sup>

- Of the total cost of coronary heart disease to the UK in 2003, 25% was due to direct health care costs, 41% to productivity losses, and 34% to the informal care of people with coronary heart disease.<sup>44</sup>

### **How promoting workplace mental wellbeing can help**

- People with depression are at greater risk of developing a heart disease.<sup>45</sup>
- Several studies suggest that anxiety is associated with an increased risk of coronary heart disease, including sudden cardiac death; and panic disorder is shown to commonly co-exist with high blood pressure.<sup>46</sup>
- Anxiety is also related to smoking and high blood pressure – both of which are risk factors for coronary heart disease.<sup>47</sup>
- Stress is related to the development of high blood pressure, an important risk factor for coronary heart disease and stroke.<sup>48</sup>
- High job demands are associated with high blood pressure and high levels of cholesterol in men, as well as with high blood pressure in women.<sup>49</sup>
- The probability of dying from or suffering from coronary heart disease is 20% to 25% higher for men exposed to high demands and low control over working tasks compared to non-exposed workers. In women, job strain increases the risk of coronary heart disease from 20% to 60%.<sup>50</sup>
- Coronary heart disease can affect people's mental health. The prevalence of depression in the general population ranges from 3% to 10%, but among patients who have coronary heart disease the rate rises to 25%.<sup>51</sup>

## **Diabetes**

### **Prevalence**

- The best estimate of the prevalence of type 2 diabetes in England is 4.3% for men and 3.4% for women.<sup>52</sup>

### **Cost**

- Estimates of the cost of diabetes vary, but one source states that diabetes accounts for some 9% of the total NHS budget, representing a total of approximately £5.2 billion a year.<sup>53</sup>

### **How promoting workplace mental wellbeing can help**

- Recent research has found a link between work stress and diabetes. Stress at work is linked with potentially preventable unhealthy lifestyle behaviour, including an unhealthy diet that is high in saturated fat and calories and physical inactivity – both of which increase the risk for diabetes.<sup>45</sup>
- Work stress increases the risk of weight gain among workers, particularly among those already overweight or obese, and being overweight is a risk factor for diabetes.<sup>54</sup>



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