

## RECENT HEALTH AND WELLBEING RESEARCH

Improving the health and well-being of UK citizens is currently a major government concern. So much so, that they have funded a great deal of research aimed at trying to determine how best to do this. As UK citizens spend much of their time at work, all the reports state that the workplace should be more involved in promoting information on health and well being.

Many organisations are therefore starting to recognise a corporate responsibility to provide information and advice on health and well being in the workplace. However, there are also good economic reasons for tackling health and well being at work. Poor employee health and well-being can result in reduced performance and increased absenteeism.

As a result of this a number of research projects have also been carried out to try to determine good practice for tackling health and well being at work and to try to evaluate different approaches.

Some of the most prominent research is outlined below

### Research and recommendations for the role of the workplace in improving health and well being in the UK

1. In her review of Britain's working age population - "Working for Healthier Tomorrow (Spring 2008) Dame Carol Black devoted a whole Chapter to health at Work. Chapter 3 Good Health is Good Business" In this she stated that there was insufficient access to support for people in the early stages of sickness and recommended that organisations could play a larger role in promoting good health. She also suggested that work could provide training for employees and managers.
2. The Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Well being (Oct 2008) stated that
  - employers should play a part in reducing the stigma of mental ill-health
  - fulfilling work can be beneficial for mental health
  - poor conditions in the workplace can cause stress and exacerbate mental health problems
  - employers should be encouraged to foster work environments that are conducive to good mental well being and the enhancement of mental capital
  - collection of wellbeing data against key performance indicators
  - employers in both the public and private sector should be encouraged to carry out an annual stress and wellbeing audit and act on its findings
  - better training for managers so they understand the impact they can have on mental capital and wellbeing
  - raising the profile of the importance of mental health and well being at work -
  - encourage companies to include wellbeing indicators in their annual reports – thereby benchmarking their performance for shareholders and showcasing any improvements

### 3. The Boorman report NHS staff health and Well-being Review 23rd November 2009

- All NHS leaders and managers are developed and equipped to recognise the link between staff health and well-being and organisational performance and their actions are judged in terms of whether they contribute to or undermine staff health and well-being
- All NHS trusts develop and implement strategies for actively improving the health and well-being of their workforce – this should be developed with a full involvement of staff
- All NHS staff should implement the NICE guidance on promoting mental health and well-being at work
- Training in health and well-being should be an integral part of management training and leadership development ... and should be built into annual performance assessment and personal development planning processes
- Ensuring managers have the skills and tools to support staff with mental health problems
- When drawing up a health and well-being strategy a proper assessment is taken of key health priorities and risk factors. These should fully reflect legal requirements in this area
- Consistent access to early interventions
- In addition to core services there should provide a range of specific health and well-being services targeted at the needs of the organisation
- Staff engagement critical in determining what services are required
- Staff health and wellbeing services should be regularly assessed and reviewed

### 4. NICE Guidance for employers on promoting mental wellbeing through productive and healthy working conditions

These guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) set out clear recommendations, based on the best available evidence. The guidance is for those who have a direct or indirect role in, and responsibility for, promoting mental wellbeing at work. This includes all employers and their representatives, irrespective of the size of the business or organisation. There are 5 recommendations and all can be seen at <http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/live/12331/45895/45895.pdf>

Below are recommendations 1 and 4 around which the e-learning was based

#### **Recommendation 1: strategic and coordinated approach to promoting employees' mental wellbeing**

Adopt an organisation-wide approach to promoting the mental wellbeing of all employees, working in partnership with them. This approach should integrate the promotion of mental wellbeing into all policies and practices concerned with managing people, including those related to employment rights and working conditions.

- Ensure that the approach takes account of the nature of the work, the workforce and the characteristics of the organisation.

Promote a culture of participation, equality and fairness that is based on open communication and inclusion.

- Create an awareness and understanding of mental wellbeing and reduce the potential for discrimination and stigma related to mental health problems.
- Ensure processes for job design, selection, recruitment, training, development and appraisal promote mental wellbeing and reduce the potential for stigma and discrimination. Employees should have the necessary skills and support to meet the demands of a job that is worthwhile and offers opportunities for development and progression. Employees should be fully supported throughout organisational change and situations of uncertainty.
- Ensure that groups of employees who might be exposed to stress but might be less likely to be included in the various approaches for promoting mental wellbeing have the equity of opportunity to participate. These groups include part-time workers, shift workers and migrant workers..

#### **Recommendation 4: the role of line managers**

**Strengthen the role of line managers in promoting the mental wellbeing of employees through supportive leadership style and management practices. This will involve:**

- promoting a management style that encourages participation, delegation, constructive feedback, mentoring and coaching
- ensuring that policies for the recruitment, selection, training and development of managers recognise and promote these skills
- ensuring that managers are able to motivate employees and provide them with the training and support they need to develop their performance and job satisfaction
- increasing understanding of how management style and practices can help to promote the mental wellbeing of employees and keep their stress to a minimum 7

### **Research and guidance on best practice for tackling health and wellbeing at work**

#### **I. Health and Safety Executive**

Following a landmark legal case for stress at work The HSE stated that it is necessary to carry out regular risk assessments for stress. Based a great deal of research they have produced a set of comprehensive guidelines. These are available in the HSE publication managing the Cause of Work Related Stress – ISBN 978-0-7176-6273-9 alternatively they can be accessed from the HSE web site [www.hse.gov.uk/stress](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress) .A shortened version is available on the ApP web site.

Major research on which the guidance is based was published in **Work and Stress (2004) 18 No 2 Special Issue – “Risk Management: Work and Organisational Factors”** This journal contains a number of research papers all related to work related stress and mental health. In particular is the research paper entitled **“management standards and work related stress in the UK: policy background and science by Mackay et al (2004).** This outlines how the HSE guidance was developed and discusses much of the theory on which it was based. Of particular interest are the following points.

- The more control employees have the better they perform, the fewer days they take off sick and the less likely they are to leave
- The clearer employees are of their role the more productive they are, the more they are at work and the more likely they are to stay
- The better an organisation manages change, the more likely they are to retain staff and decrease absence
- Higher levels of support and better relationships at work improve business performance
- Even simple interventions to improve job control and change management can reduce sickness absence up to 28%.

## **2. RRI33 - Beacons of excellence in stress prevention.**

At the same time as the HSE were developing their guidance for stress the Beacons of Excellence Research was being carried out. This describes the authors' work to identify good practice in stress prevention. It summarises and draws conclusions from many academic studies on stress prevention, and uses this information, as well as advice from a panel of international experts, to develop a comprehensive stress prevention model. This model is then used to describe examples of stress prevention practices within a wide range of UK organizations. Of particular importance is their finding that successful stress management interventions all tend to have the following components:

- top management commitment
- risk analysis
- stress prevention strategy
- a participative approach
- interventions concentrating on individuals teams and organisations

The report can be found on the HSE web site at [www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrhtm/rr133.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrhtm/rr133.htm)

## **3. HSE obstacles RR389 ISMAUK stress workshops 04: Attitudes, opinions**

This report summarises the results of telephone research undertaken on behalf of the Health & Safety Executive between 10 June and 24 June 2005, it can be accessed from [www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrhtm/rr389.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrhtm/rr389.htm)

Of most interest here is that it cites the obstacles that organisations need to overcome to produce effect stress programmes. These are:

- 61% lack of time
- 55% lack of understanding about stress in general
- 48% lack of manager commitment
- 46% stigma of stress
- 34% lack of senior management buy in

Some of these obstacles are addressed in the Beacons of Excellence Research.

And finally a very recent piece of research is

#### **4. RR633 Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress Phase Two**

This research identifies the management behaviours necessary to implement the HSE Management Standards. These are basically good people management skills and apply to all aspects of managing employee health and well being. This research can also be accessed from

[www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrhtm/rr633.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrhtm/rr633.htm)

From these reports and guidelines there are a number of common themes that have been recommended for successfully addressing to health and well being at work.

These are as follows:

- Organisations should take a strategic approach to health and well-being. Senior managers need to be involved and take responsibility (e.g. NICE, Boorman Report Black HSE).
- Regular assessments of employee psychological well-being should be made. Such as using a survey tool (e.g. Foresight, NICE HSE).
- Managers should have health and well-being key performance indicators (E.g. Foresight, Boorman).
- Leaders and managers should be trained and developed to deal with health and well-being issues (all reports).
- Employees should be trained to improve health and well being at work (Carol Black. HSE)