

Factsheet

Raising awareness of mental health and well-being and its effects in the workplace

What is it?

Just as we strive to maintain our general health so should we try to maintain our mental health. Mental ill-health can take many forms and can be a long-term or short-term or spasmodic condition. It is one of many non-visible disabilities and can affect anyone at any time.

Mental ill-health can present in many ways, common forms are depression and anxiety (often related to stress). Problems range from normal everyday worries (which people may perceive very differently) to serious long-term conditions.

Good mental health means (among other things):

- the ability to learn, to express a range of positive and negative emotions and to cope with them, to be able to form and maintain good relationships with others and to manage change and uncertainty.
- the ability to enjoy life more of the time and fulfill your own personal potential as well as being able to play a full role in family relationships, with friends and in external interests and employment – this is sometimes called 'well-being' too.

Just as your general health may change, your mental health may not stay the same either. Your reactions to life's common challenges may be different at different times in your life. Events that you take in your stride when you are 25 may cause a period of depression and a longer-lasting effect on your well-being if the same thing occurs 20 years later.

How common is mental ill-health?

Mental health problems are among the most common health problems. As many as one-in-four of us will have a mental health problem at some time in our lives. It can be difficult to quantify exactly but mixed anxiety and depression is the most common mental disorder in Britain, with almost 9% of people meeting the criteria for diagnosis.*

About half of people will no longer be affected after 18 months but those who are long-term sick or unemployed are more likely to be still affected than the general population.*

Common mental health problems peak in middle age although anyone can be affected regardless of age.*

Many people go through low periods when they feel anxious, stressed, sad or depressed for a time, perhaps after loss of a job or relationship. Usually these feelings pass. People's ability to cope with these events varies enormously too. For example, bereavement will cause many different emotions but is not an illness or necessarily a cause of depression. However, with understanding and support, especially the ability to express their feelings, the person bereaved may avoid longer-term problems.

There is a stigma attached to mental health problems which adds to the burden and may mean that people do not seek help when they need it.

What effect may it have in the workplace?

It can be difficult to recognise – even the person suffering may not realise what is happening to them. Changes in behaviour, unexplained absences, lateness, tearfulness, lack of appetite, tiredness, refusal or disinclination to engage with others or in social activities, difficulty in making decisions may all indicate that something is wrong – of course it may not be a mental health problem but something else entirely. Gentle questioning about 'how are things going?' can provide a lead in and opening for the person to talk. Listening may be the most helpful thing that you can do.

Effects may not be limited to the one individual member of staff. Some of the effects above may begin to impact on the rest of the team, for example if they are covering the work of someone who is not playing their usual part in the team. If you are a line manager you need to get to know your team members so that you will pick up on issues quickly and already have a supportive relationship in place to start to address any problems or needs.

What should I be doing to support a person who has a mental health problem in my workplace?

- There is no obligation to disclose it to a colleague or manager, but it helps if they do so that safe systems of work can be in place and any adjustments made, so encourage the person to talk to their manager. Offer to be with them when having those discussions – they may not want you to, but the offer of help will mean a lot.
- Encourage them to speak to their GP or keep appointments with any therapist that is already involved.
- Help them to find and understand self-help tips from the internet, books or a support group.
- Tell them about the support available in NHSBT, including Occupational Health and our Employee Assistance programme.

What should I be thinking about if I am the manager of someone who may have a mental health problem?

- Remember it is not your job to diagnose or treat any condition! While it is good for people to talk and healthy to be aware of one's own mental health, there is no obligation to disclose (*see previous page*).
- You are only concerned with the person at work and the effects at work of what they are going through. It is not your responsibility to take on a counselling or therapeutic role!
- Consider the suggestions above and think particularly about whether any adjustments are needed now or may be needed in future so that you can plan and the person with a mental health problem will feel more confident and re-assured. Having an understanding manager is something that many employees value above all other support that NHSBT has to offer.
- People with a mental health problem may need to adjust their work patterns to accommodate their therapy or to achieve a better work life balance. If stress at work is a factor then getting a better balance could make a difference. See NHSBT's Flexible Working Policy.
- They may have to manage their meetings and work to ensure their meal times and break times are regularly taken.
- Ask the person if there are signs or symptoms that they would like you to look out for which mean that they are unwell or are becoming unwell, and what actions they would like you to take at that point, and whether there is someone that they would like you to contact.
- Remember to remind them about NHSBT's independent confidential Employee Assistance programme too. (*See below*).

Get advice yourself from Occupational Health. If you have any concerns about health and work you can give them a call on **0845 601 3247** for advice.

Call our **Employee Assistance programme** for information which you can pass on to the person and help them look for their own sources of support. Contact HR Direct for support from HR colleagues if needed.

If you would like more information then please contact your nearest Disability Advocate http://nhsbtweb/group_services/human_resources/equality_and_diversity/information_for_disabled_employees/disability_advocate_scheme.asp

More help from:

NHSBT Disability Advocates pages on the Intranet. http://nhsbtweb/group_services/diversity_and_engagement/disability_advocacy/index.asp

Business Forum for Disability, Line Managers Guide for Mental Health is available to download from the Disability Advocates intranet portal http://nhsbtweb/userfiles/mental_health_at_work.pdf

Mental Health Foundation www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Business Disability Forum (NHSBT is a member organisation)

For the bereaved: Cruse Bereavement Care. www.cruse.org.uk

See our Health and Wellbeing pages on the Intranet: http://nhsbtweb/group_services/health_and_safety/health_and_wellbeing/index.asp

Capita Health and Wellbeing provide us with Occupational Health and Wellbeing services across the whole service. The benefits include:

Staff can use the Capita Health and Wellbeing website to refer their staff to Occupational Health and Wellbeing. To view the website and register for an account http://nhsbtweb/group_services/health_and_safety/health_and_wellbeing/index.asp

Medical Helpdesk, Self-referral and General Information – **0845 601 3247**. This can be used to discuss general information regarding health issues and track progress of referrals.

Please also look at our **Employee Assistance programme** provided by Capita for more information. This is a 24/7 confidential and free advice line provided completely independently of NHSBT for your assistance. Telephone **0800 716017** or go to www.first-assist.com

For further information about this Factsheet or other sources of support please contact:

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