

# Learning Lessons Quarterly Bulletin

Newsletter Date Spring 2014

## Focus on Stress, Anxiety & Depression

Welcome to South Staffordshire and Shropshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust's Learning Lessons bulletin.

As a Trust we recognise the benefits that can be had from sharing and cascading learning from incidents and near misses, and know that if this is done effectively it can help to minimise future risk and strengthen the quality of the services we provide.

The Trust is committed to quality improvement, and will continue its strong focus on delivering high quality, safe and effective services. This new quarterly bulletin is an important component of a number of key approaches embraced by the Trust to drive forward the quality agenda.

The ultimate aim of evaluating our services and learning lessons is to improve outcomes for service users. This bulletin is intended to support this aim by communicating and strengthening local and national lessons to be learnt from both positive practice and areas for improvement.

In this issue we have focused on the subject of stress, anxiety and depression. We shall take a look at the issues, especially 'stress' - what it is, the law, how to manage it and the tools available to do this including guidance available from the HSE (Health and Safety Executive) and the use of their stress indicator tool.

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## Stress, Anxiety and Depression Statistics

### The National Context:

Average absence level within the public services sector was 8.7 days per employee/year

Of the top five health conditions for non-manual workers stress equates 53% and for manual workers 45%

Of the top five health conditions for non-manual workers Mental ill-health equates 27% and for manual workers 28%

In the public sector of the top five health conditions for non-manual workers stress equates 64% and for manual workers 58%

In the public sector of the top five health conditions for non-manual workers Mental ill-health equates 38% and for manual workers 33%

### The Trust Context as at End of February 2014:

76 individuals were absent with Stress/Anxiety/Depression or other Psychiatric Illnesses, amounting to 1288.4 hours

Stress/Anxiety/Depression or other Psychiatric Illnesses were the main reasons for absences during February at 30.5% of all of the absences



## Stress, Anxiety and Depression

Everybody responds differently to the stresses and strains of modern life and it is common to describe ourselves as 'depressed', 'stressed' or 'anxious' at times. For some, these feelings can become serious enough to make it difficult to carry on with normal daily activities. Indeed, 1 in 6 adults have a mental health condition at any one time – and among adults of working age that can be as high as 1 in 3.

The definition of mental ill health covers a very wide spectrum, from the worries and grief we all experience as part of everyday life to the most bleak, suicidal depression or complete loss of touch with everyday reality. The most common diagnosable mental health conditions are briefly described below.

### STRESS, ANXIETY & DEPRESSION

For some, the link between stress and mental ill health may be a new one. We all need and, to a degree, thrive on pressure: it gives us energy, helps with performance and inspires confidence. But excessive pressure can lead to stress.

**Stress** may become a problem when a person feels they don't have the resources to cope with the demands placed upon them. Symptoms may be emotional (e.g. irritability, tearfulness) and physical (aches and pains, high blood pressure etc). The person may find it difficult to make decisions or perform tasks and may be unable to attend work. Harmful levels of stress can lead to mental health difficulties such as anxiety and depression.

**Anxiety** becomes a problem when feelings of tension and fear prevent a person from carrying out everyday tasks. People with a generalised anxiety disorder find it hard to control their worries. The ability to think with clarity can also be affected. In some cases people may suffer panic attacks or phobias. Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a form of anxiety where people have recurrent, intrusive thoughts, which they may feel 'forced' to act on (e.g. fears of contamination leading to repetitive hand washing).

**Depression** is sometimes described as mild, moderate or severe. Symptoms include feelings of deep sadness that can last for a long time (weeks or months) and are serious enough to interfere with daily life. Motivation can be affected and people may experience thoughts of life not being worth living, which in some cases can lead to suicidal behaviour.

The cause of stress, anxiety or depression may not necessarily be work-related. The person concerned may be experiencing difficulties outside the workplace such as bereavement, financial problems, relationship breakdown or other family problems. Indeed, non-work related stress, anxiety and depression cause more sickness absence than work-related difficulties<sup>6</sup>. At such times, work may be the 'safe place': the place where they feel supported and valued, and your role will be an important one.

### A MENTALLY HEALTHY WORKPLACE

The workplace and other staff can be a source of valuable support. For many people, 'work' means mobiles in the morning and Blackberries at bedtime, e-mails being sent at all times of the day and night, no such thing as a lunch break, and the office laptop being packed along with holiday suitcases. Employers have an important role in improving work-life balance and it is generally recognised that work is good for health and wellbeing. Promoting practice that supports such wellbeing will help to create a more positive working environment.

Creating a mentally healthy workplace improves productivity, increases profit and brings the best out of everyone. It also costs less to support and retain experienced employees than recruit and train new ones. Good working environments can help recovery, prevent distress and reduce the likelihood of mental health conditions developing or worsening.

On the next page there are suggestions on how to help.



## Learning Lessons Features



### HOW TO HELP

Remember, as a line manager, you're not expected to be a therapist or a counsellor – but you do have a valuable role in promoting a productive workplace, a healthier team and a supportive environment. You won't change the culture of the organisation overnight but you may be able to take some first steps. So, why not try and aim to:

Develop a culture where open and honest communication is encouraged, and support and mutual respect are the norm.

Encourage an ethos where staff know it's OK to talk about mental health to help reduce stigma and misunderstanding. It will also allow staff to tell you if they need any adaptations to working practice that will support them in doing their job.

Give employees control over their work. Lack of control is known to increase stress.

Ensure that every employee has the right level of skills for the job.

Make sure that staff have a manageable workload.

Operate flexible working hours (where business structures allow) so that employees can balance the demands of home life with work.

Check the work environment and eliminate unnecessary stressors such as flickering lights or unnecessary noise as these factors can aggravate anxiety in particular.

For many employees (yourself included, perhaps), the only way they know they're doing OK is when they're not being criticised.

A workplace culture where it's the norm to say 'thank you' to people for the work they've done, where ideas are welcomed and good pieces of work are acknowledged will be healthy for everyone.

### The HSE Stress Management Standards

**The HSE Stress Management Standards were developed some years ago as an alternative to regulatory standards and are based around 6 areas or 'stressors' which are known to impact on staff if not managed effectively in the workplace, these being :-**

1. Demands - Includes issues like work-load, work patterns & the work environment
2. Control - How much say the person has in the way they do their work
3. Support - Includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management & colleagues
4. Relationships - Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
5. Role - Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles
6. Change - How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation

**Team Prevent** the Trust's provider of occupational health services provides a range of services to assist staff and managers in dealing with stress, anxiety and depression and also provides extensive guidance on these and other topics in the Health and Wellbeing area of their website - access to these resources is available to all staff - if not already registered following the link;- <http://www.teampreventwellbeing.co.uk/sign-in-or-register/> and use the starter log-in code advertised on your screensaver pages.

Within the website there is a range of information available on Stress - take a look at the 'Managers Zone' in sub-section 'Stress Guidance', or look in the 'Health and Wellbeing Zone' again in sub-section 'Manage Stress' the latter includes developing a personal training plan, a podcast, video clips and fact sheet to assist in managing stress

### MANAGE STRESS

Everyone reacts differently to stress, and some people may have a higher threshold than others. Stress is a very personal thing. To manage stress it is vital to understand the difference between stress and pressure

Pressure is a part of all our lives – without it we could not achieve our full potential. Pressure is inevitable. It comes from a variety of sources including work, home, personal life, holidays and travel, Christmas, exams, business change and balancing work and home life. Pressure is a neutral force. How we react to pressure can make the difference between good and bad outcomes.

#### Healthy recommendations are:

Take control and focus on what's important each day

Write a list of all your pressures

Write to do lists before you go home each evening to clear your mind

Know how to recognise stress

Relaxing your muscles and take deep breaths when feeling stressed/ anxious

Discuss your issues with a friend or someone you trust

Make a conscious effort to slow down

Try to achieve 15 plus minutes of relaxation/recuperation per day

Build in breaks and physical activity each day

Keep hydrated

Eat healthy options every 2-3 hours to keep mental energy levels high

If you would like to manage your stress better you can follow the link above to access a Personal Training Plan with a series of simple actions to follow each week along with the Video Clips & Podcast.



### Stress and the HSE Stress Management Standards

Whilst Anxiety and Depression and Stress are concerning for us all only the latter in the context of 'Work-related Stress' is of specific interest to the Health and Safety Executive as the national enforcement agency for health and safety. Readers are reminded that there are many other non-work related causes of stress

\* RIDDOR - The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases & Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 usually known as RIDDOR or RIDDOR13).

Though RIDDOR reports are submitted to a national reporting centre they are disseminated within HSE to regional offices and form a major source of intelligence to direct their enquiries and the potential need for inspections.

\*\* Stress Policy approved in July 2011

### What happens when an inspector calls - A case in point

In January 2014 an incident occurred on a ward in this Trust which resulted in a RIDDOR\* report being submitted to the HSE. Subsequent to this an inspector from the HSE paid a visit to the ward to discuss the case .

Although "Work-related Stress" is not itself reportable under these regulations it was raised as an issue during the HSE's enquiries into the reported case, which in turn led to the sequence of events noted below.

1. Copies of stress risk assessments were requested, covering the ward staff and individual staff.
2. These should have been available had the Trust's Stress Policy been followed\*\*. Unfortunately though the policy required them, none were available.
3. Instead a considerable amount of work was undertaken against a tight timescale to evidence that overall the position was known and understood even though specific risk assessments were not available.
4. Whilst the response to the HSE was informative it was nevertheless NOT a risk assessment and did not clearly demonstrate compliance with the previously mentioned Stress Management Standards. The HSE subsequently re-iterated their request for a proper documented risk assessment of the situation.
5. In due course these were completed and supplied and a satisfactory outcome with the HSE was achieved.

The demands of HSE inspectors in these situations should be not under-estimated, nor the possible consequences for failing to either heed their requests and/or come up with the goods. It is considered that in this instance the Trust was probably close to receiving an improvement notice on this issue.

### Actions over the coming months

1. A task to finish group to be established to review the existing policy and seek easy to use assessment forms, indicator tools and the like to support the policy requirements.
2. To raise awareness of the issue and the policy requirements especially risk assessment—of which this Learning Lessons is a start.
3. Emphasise the need for team risk assessments throughout the Trust at department/team level and for individuals so as to 'have a finger on the pulse' i.e. these assessments should be a matter of routine and thus pre-emptive rather than reactive.
4. Until such time as any new documentation is made available the existing policy and assessment processes should continue to be used, available in Human Resources Policies (Blue) in sub-section Dignity and Respect or [http://www.southstaffsandshropshealthcareft.nhs.uk/getattachment/8f46d980-0f00-4b86-9a44-a24a0f749ad8/H-BLU-dr-05-\(1\).aspx](http://www.southstaffsandshropshealthcareft.nhs.uk/getattachment/8f46d980-0f00-4b86-9a44-a24a0f749ad8/H-BLU-dr-05-(1).aspx)
5. Stress Awareness sessions - for staff to further inform on the issues
6. Include topic into Sickness Absence training sessions

**Contributors / Contacts for this issue:**

John Freer  
Health & Safety Lead  
Risk Management  
Trust Headquarters,  
Corporation Street, Stafford, ST16 3SR  
Tel 01785 257888 ext. 7128593

Kim Taylor  
Business Partner  
Directorate of HR, OD & Equality  
South Staffs & Shropshire NHS Foundation Trust,  
Trust Headquarters,  
Corporation Street, Stafford, ST16 3SR  
Tel 01785 257888 ext 8136 (Stafford)  
Fax 01785 221467  
Tel 01743 210105 (Shelton)  
Mob 07792308712

Mark Butler  
Staff Side Representative,  
RCN Lead Steward (RCN South Staffs Branch)  
South Staffordshire and Shropshire Healthcare  
NHS Foundation Trust |  
Staff Side Office | St Georges Hospital |  
Corporation Street | Stafford | ST16 3AG |  
t: 01785 221670 | m: 07790749939 | e:  
mark.butler@sssft.nhs.uk |nhs.net:  
mark.butler@nhs.net | w:  
www.southstaffsandshropshealthcareft.nhs.uk/

Team Prevent UK Ltd  
Occupational Health Dept.  
Stonefield House  
St.George's Hospital  
Corporation Street, Stafford ST16 3SR  
Tel 01785 221659

**Your Risk Management Team:**

Liz Lockett  
Associate Director Quality & Risk  
01785 257888 ext. 7128578

Sarah Hankey  
Risk & Claims Manager  
01785 257888 ext. 7128695

Giles Perry  
Local Security Management Specialist  
01785 257888 ext. 7128696

John Freer  
Health & Safety Lead  
01785 257888 ext. 7128593

Alison Turner  
Risk Management Officer  
01785 257888 ext. 7128591

Nicholas Hulme  
Quality & Risk Information Analyst  
01785 257888 ext. 7128590

Sheila Kavanagh  
Team Secretary  
01785 257888 ext. 7128592



This Bulletin is available on the Trust  
website at :

[http://  
www.southstaffsandshropshealthcareft.  
nhs.uk/Default.aspx](http://www.southstaffsandshropshealthcareft.nhs.uk/Default.aspx)

Or alternatively

A hard copy can be obtained by con-  
tacting the Trust Risk Management  
Department on 07850 257888 ext 5953

- We welcome your feedback on this Learning Lessons Bulletin to help us to ensure that future editions are helpful and informative
- We would also welcome your ideas for future features or areas of learning you feel are relevant to be cascaded across the Trust

For all enquiries and comments please contact:

**Sarah Hankey (Risk & Claims Manager)**  
**01785 221548**  
**[Sarah.hankey@sssft.nhs.uk](mailto:Sarah.hankey@sssft.nhs.uk)**