



# Mental Wellbeing

**We continue our series of articles by Dr Libby Artingstall and Dr Sile McDaid, Co-Founders and Directors of Team Mental Health. This month, mental health and wellbeing should be a priority...**

In every profession, no matter what your size or sector, the mental health and wellbeing of your workforce must be a priority.

In October 2018 the Health and Safety Executive published findings to show that in the UK, the legal profession has higher prevalence rates of work-related stress, depression or anxiety than many other occupations.<sup>1</sup>

A recent survey published by the Junior Lawyers Division of the Law Society highlighted long, unpredictable hours, high client demands and billable hours targets as significant factors leading to stress and mental ill health.<sup>2</sup> However, this issue is not clear cut and the experiences of those working in the legal profession will differ based on many other factors which may include scope of practice, stage of career, perceived and experienced stigma relating to the disclosure of mental health problems, and the level of resources available to support wellbeing. There is also a school of thought suggesting that certain personality attributes and characteristics common amongst lawyers may increase their vulnerability to mental health problems.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

There is growing recognition of the importance of changing the way we perceive and manage mental health across the legal sector. Alongside this, there is real and proactive action being taken and a whole organisation approach is central to making this action meaningful.

We have recently had the privilege of working with European Law Firm Fieldfisher to consider how best to develop and support their mental health and wellbeing strategy across the UK and Republic of Ireland. From the get-go, it was apparent to us that this was a firm really taking mental health and wellbeing seriously, investing in their people and wanting to make a significant impact, not just to implement a tick box exercise.

A core value we shared was the vital importance of addressing misconceptions and communicating what mental health actually is.

Mental health is defined by the World Health Organisation as "a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community."<sup>6</sup>

Earlier this year we delivered a training session to the partners and senior managers at Fieldfisher's Manchester office. The commitment of the firm was clear and the turn-out was fantastic. In any organisation, to really make a difference it is important for senior leaders and managers to be on board. Not only does this enable change, resource and strategies to be embedded across an organisation, it also reinforces to all employees that they are valued and appreciated. Training at this level ensures that those in leadership and management positions are informed, able and confident to support others in the firm. Importantly, it also provides the opportunity to empower leaders and managers to look after and protect their own mental health. Leading by example is key.

Whilst employers have various legal obligations in relation to supporting employees in the workplace, it is essential that we educate everyone to look after their mental health as we do our physical health. To demonstrate their commitment to a whole organisation approach, Fieldfisher asked us to deliver a 'lunch and learn'

seminar which was made available to all in the Manchester office. Once again, the turn-out was great and it provided another fantastic opportunity to inform and empower.

Sam Jardine, partner at Fieldfisher, commented: "As with many sectors, the legal profession can place high demands on us. The feedback across the office from the recent training was unanimously positive. It has opened up an important conversation in an area which the legal profession has historically overlooked, oftentimes at significant personal cost to individuals and to the detriment of the profession as a whole. There is no good reason for that to continue, and every reason to learn more and improve in this area."

At Team Mental Health we work to raise awareness and support you to define and develop a mental health strategy that delivers. We recognise that all organisations, and their people, are different and needs vary. That's why we work with you to find the solution that's right.

Through our unique support framework 'Mental Health is Everyone's Business', our online and face to face mental health awareness training, or through consultation, we provide the know-how to:

- prevent mental illness
- promote good mental health
- detect problems
- intervene early and
- support recovery

We can help you to drive positive change and realise the benefits of investing to develop and maintain a mentally healthy workforce.

We believe the best law firms will be those accepting the reality of the situation and that act to address the problems associated with mental ill health and promote positive mental health across the legal profession. We are proud to be working with Fieldfisher in supporting their innovative solutions to secure a mentally healthy workforce now and into the future.

Contact Team Mental Health  
[www.teammentalhealth.co.uk](http://www.teammentalhealth.co.uk)  
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