



Mental Wellbeing

We continue our series of articles by Dr Libby Artingstall and Dr Sile McDaid, Co-Founders and Directors of Team Mental Health.

In January this year, Deloitte published the findings of research they have undertaken in relation to poor mental health at work. 'Mental health and employers: refreshing the case for investment' is an extremely informative report. It's available online and we encourage you all to read it.

A key finding of their research was that the estimated cost of poor mental health to UK employers is between £42-£45 bn per year. An increase of 16% over two years. These costs were mainly in relation to:

- An increase in the prevalence of mental ill health at work;
- a fall in sickness absence and a corresponding rise in 'presenteeism' (working when mentally unwell and being less productive and potentially more likely to make mistakes); and
- 'leavism' (where employees are unable to 'switch off' or disconnect from work ... a reflection of an 'always on' culture)

Another key finding was that young professionals (18-29 years) have emerged as the most vulnerable demographic in the workplace. They are:

- Twice as likely to experience depression in comparison to the average worker;
- more likely to present themselves at work, rather than take days off, if they are struggling with their mental health; and
- more susceptible to 'leavism'.

These survey findings could potentially feel negative. However, we believe they need to be used as a positive. This is because they provide us with valuable insight and allow us to really think about the action we can take to drive meaningful (and not 'tick box') change.

In our opinion, how can law firms use this information to their advantage and support the young people within their profession?

One of the first points highlighted in this article is an increase in the prevalence of mental health problems at work. This is something we feel hugely passionate about. At medical school, and in our career as doctors, we were taught to treat physical illness; but we were also taught to prevent it. We were taught just how to treat mental illness; not to prevent it. In our opinion, this is wrong and is a huge factor influencing why we face a mental health crisis in the UK. Historically, we have only stepped in when there's a problem that requires attention. There needs to be a change. Of course, we always need to and should support those experiencing difficulties, but we also need to focus on the other end of the spectrum ... preventing mental ill health and promoting good mental health. We're not just talking about in healthcare, we're talking about our wider communities, particularly our workforces.

So, how do we prevent mental ill health, try to reduce the numbers of those experiencing poor mental health and promote good mental health? For us, a lot of this relates to education and providing information to empower people. We recognise that firms are beginning to invest in mental health awareness training, which is great, and this is something we feel hugely passionate about.

However, mental health awareness training has to be so much more than a 'tick box' exercise. Providing training to a certain number of people within an organisation to 'spot signs' and signpost people to access support is not enough. Training must be holistic and all-encompassing if it is to drive positive change. It has to reach everyone, from those at the top through to the juniors on the front-



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line. It is essential to support all your people who make your firm what it is. Across the board we need to provide everyone with the information they need to help them look after and protect their mental health.

Training for managers also needs to be comprehensive. Managers need to feel confident in their skills and ability to promote good mental health and support people experiencing difficulties. On top of this, they need to be able to try and prevent mental ill health in a more focused way; and a significant part of this is through completing work-related stress risk assessments and acting on them. Not only is this a legal obligation, it's also a really useful way of addressing any concerns which could be impacting on someone's mental health and ultimately your organisation. Work-related stress itself is not a mental illness. However, if we are exposed to prolonged periods of stress, we are at increased risk of developing mental ill health. By effectively assessing and managing work-related stress, we can limit the risk of developing a mental illness. In this process, we are also likely to identify and address any issues which may be impacting on presenteeism and 'leavism' within an organisation.

We also need to provide people at the top with information so that there is genuine 'buy in' and mental health and wellbeing becomes a priority issue for the entire firm. Whole organisational cultures that drive positive mental health outcomes is what firms should aspire to. There needs to be a plan .. a mental health strategy .. and its impact needs to be evaluated. Firms should be aiming to implement evidence based, best-practice recommendations, address the needs and challenges of their organisation, and monitor the mental health and wellbeing of their employees.

In a nutshell, our position is that a way for firms to take real, meaningful action is to inform and empower everyone. Reaching everyone in an organisation can feel like a challenge but there are many ways this can be done. In real terms, this probably means a combination of face to face training, lunch and learn sessions, online training and the distribution of helpful resources. The benefits of providing online training and resources include time and cost effectiveness, and a consistent message can be delivered



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to large numbers of people. In addition, you can increase the likelihood of uptake by limiting the associated stigma. Sometimes, people may be put off attending face to face training events, seminars or lunch and learn sessions because of a worry they may be 'exposed' or labelled as someone with a mental health problem.

Whilst this is very much our opinion, the value of a whole organisation approach was reflected in the report published by Deloitte; particularly when it comes to return on investment. Their research found that interventions that achieve higher returns tend to have the following characteristics:

- They offer a large-scale culture change, or organisation-wide initiatives supporting large numbers of employees;
- they are focused on prevention or designed to build employee resilience;
- they use technology or diagnostics to tailor support for those most at risk.

Organisation wide awareness raising returns £6 for every £1 spent. For a comparison, the provision of 1:1 mental health support for those experiencing difficulties returns £3 for every £1 spent. At Team Mental Health, our position is simple. Alongside supporting those who are in need, firms have to focus on prevention and promotion.

For more information about the services we offer contact us at training@teammentalhealth.co.uk or visit our website www.teammentalhealth.co.uk

Reference:

Deloitte (2020). Mental health and employers: Refreshing the case for investment. Available online at: <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/uk/Documents/consultancy/deloitte-uk-mental-health-and-employers.pdf>

