



Event Report

Working Lunch – Healthy Working Lives; Mental Health and Stress in the Workplace.

Sponsored by John Lewis – Member Company who are currently pursuing the Gold Healthy Working Lives Award.

Tuesday 25th September 2007

Please Note: Please contact Maree Drury, SBC, if you would like the contact details for any of the speakers, the Healthy Working Lives Team or more information on this topic.

Speaker notes

❖ **Chris Scott, Training and Development Manager, Forth Sector,**

Chris Scott started his presentation by recognising that everyone may leave this seminar full of inspiration and enthusiasm to take what they have learnt about mental health & stress back into their workplace; they will first have to convince management with a sound business case. Subsequently, Chris focused the rest of his presentation on establishing the business case for implementing good practice in regards to mental health in the workplace.

Chris recognised that in order to get management buy in you need a robust evidence based argument which is placed firmly in the business context. Mental health problems in the workplace are costing UK businesses an average of £5 billion per year (this is a conservative figure). If you take the example of one employee off sick in an organisation this cost is made up of sickness pay, pension contributions, occupational health fees, finding temporary cover and loss of training invested. Chris illustrated his point with the case study of “Donna”, who had worked with a large insurance company for over 15 years. However, due to poor management, increased demands and personal issues “Donna” was signed off work with depression – this was to cost the company approx £48,000 and she was never to return to work.

Whilst it is obvious from the above case study that it was not only the work environment that contributed to “Donna” developing mental health problems. Chris stated that there were steps this organisation could have taken to ensure that any risks were identified and mitigated before the situation resulted in “Donna” being signed off sick.

Interventions could include:

- Mental health awareness training for management – to include tackling stigma and how to recognise/ mitigate for signs of mental illness such as depression. (this can be accessed through the Healthy Working Lives Award Programme)
- Training for employees focusing on how to recognise when their own mental health is beginning to suffer and what coping strategies they could use.



❖ **Bob Allan, Health and Safety Officer, Lothian Fire and Rescue Service.**

Bob's presentation focused on the Lothian Fire and Rescue Service's approach to mental health and wellbeing. The Fire & Rescue Service has been through a significant period of change in the last 4 years and they recognised that these changes could be having a detrimental impact on the well-being of staff. In response to this they undertook a comprehensive whole population survey, supported by an occupational psychologist using the HSE Management Standards for Work Related Stress.

As a consequence of the study, training in work related stress was provided for all senior managers and crucially was endorsed by the Chief Fire Officer. All managers also received work related stress packs. Several comprehensive campaigns to communicate with staff were seen as essential to help overcome and address the stigma associated with mental health.

Since carrying out the Work Related stress and Mental health study the Lothian Fire and Rescue Service sickness absence rates have reduced significantly.

Bob had the following learning experience/advice to other organisations wanting to address this issue:

- It is important to get top-level management buy-in immediately
- Because of certain limitations of the toolkit, the LBFRS undertook a cultural audit, to run in tandem with the stress survey, (which included BME and LGB issues) within the organisation. Without this facility, it would be very beneficial to include BME and LGB fields to identify possible work related stressors from these minority groups
- Stress as an issue needs to be explained properly to senior management, so that it is not seen by the organisation as a weakness or a criticism of management ability
- Use independent people for the focus groups, for example Occupational Health Nurses – this ensures that focus groups leaders do not have an 'agenda' and that the issues can be raised openly and freely

