Marsh Commercial

Supporting minds on the frontline

How to improve the mental wellbeing of your employees

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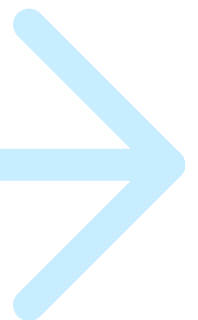
Introduction

The Care Quality Commission's first annual State of Health and Care report found the COVID-19 pandemic has undone years of progress in the sector. Healthcare leaders are calling for more investment in the NHS and care system going forward, to recover the damage and ensure vital services remain available for years to come.

An estimated £12 billion per year is required to avoid a decade of health disruption. The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) carried out a polling of 172 senior leaders in NHS agencies and local government. The study found staff burnout and a surge in mental illness were the post-pandemic challenges that worried health leaders the most.[1]

The pandemic has presented a number of new challenges whilst exacerbating existing challenges for healthcare staff. Carrying this extra burden for more than a year has often come at huge individual and personal expense.

The commitment and sacrifice of the nation's frontline workers has been highly commendable, and employers are looking to do all they can to support and retain their incredible staff.

In the following pages, we explore the challenge of mental ill health in the workplace; what demographics are most at risk and what employers can do to understand and meet the needs of their staff.

1| https://www.ippr.org/news-and-media/press-releases/12-billion-booster-shot-needed-to-make-nhs-and-social-care-fit-for-future-after-pandemic-landmark-report

Mental ill health in the workplace

Mental illness is the second-largest source of burden of disease in England. Mental illnesses are more common, long-lasting and impactful than other health conditions.

Mental ill health is responsible for

72m

working days lost

54%

of all working days lost due to health issues

44%

of all cases of work-related ill health

£34.9bn

in losses each year

How this might impact your

Business

1 in 5 people take a day off due to stress. Yet, 90% of these people cited a different reason for their absence.

Every year it costs a business £1,300 per employee whose mental health needs are unsupported.

69% of UK line managers say that supporting employee wellbeing is a core skill, but only 13% have received mental health training.

People

People with a long-term mental health condition lose their jobs every year at around double the rate of those without a mental health condition.[2]

More than two thirds of adults with mental health problems reported that their mental health got worse during lockdown.

As a direct consequence of the pandemic and all that follows, many people who were previously well will now develop mental health problems.[3]

2| https://mhfaengland.org/mhfa-centre/research-and-evaluation/mental-health-statistics/

3| https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/5929/the-mental-health-emergency_a4_final.pdf

How the pandemic has impacted the carers in our community

More than half of the UK's frontline health and social care workers experienced a mental health disorder during the first COVID-19 lockdown.[4]

Over a fifth of these met the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder.[5]

Sickness rates in April 2020 for NHS staff in England were at their highest in a decade, with the most common reason reported as mental ill health.[6]

The youngest workers (18–34 years) were hardest hit, with 71% reporting a worsening in their mental health.[7]

As a professional group, health and social care staff – especially lower paid staff – have higher rates of pre-existing mental health conditions than the general population. This increases their risk of their mental health worsening as a result of the pandemic.[8]

4| https://pharmaceutical-journal.com/article/news/almost-60-of-frontline-healthcare-workers-experienced-mental-health-disorder-during-first-lockdown
5| https://pharmaceutical-journal.com/article/news/almost-60-of-frontline-healthcare-workers-experienced-mental-health-disorder-during-first-lockdown
6| https://post.parliament.uk/mental-health-impacts-of-covid-19-on-nhs-healthcare-staff/
7| https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/blogs/emerging-evidence-of-covid-19s-unequal-mental-health-impacts-on-health-and
8| https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/blogs/emerging-evidence-of-covid-19s-unequal-mental-health-impacts-on-health-and

Lifting spirits through the first wave

By August 2020, it seemed as though the worst days were behind us. We reached out to clients, asking them about their experience managing the crisis. Care providers explained in detail the decisions they made, the actions they took, and the lessons we can all learn about navigating a crisis situation. Central to every story was the commitment and sacrifice of frontline workers.

Read the full story here
Caring Through COVID-19.

> Keep your team's morale up. We did everything we could to keep our team motivated, from making badges that called out their status as carers during COVID-19 to sending food parcels of ready-made dinners. Even the smallest touches can help keep people's spirits up.

Alexandra Wortley
Managing Director, Expertise Homecare

> Everybody from the top of the organisation down has been in constant communication to help out and reassure.
>
> Managers have been taking time out of their personal lives to show their appreciation. We've been putting together survival kits filled with chocolates, herbal teas, hand creams and the like. I think that as hard as things have been, we've seen some incredible positives come out of this time. Everyone in the company has been at their absolute best, and when that happens it just inspires everyone around them to be the same.

Aymi Brown
Manager, South West Care Homes

> "As soon as we knew that we were going to have to close our offices, we invested in all the technology we needed to keep everyone connected – mobiles, laptops, softphones, home broadband, webcams, and more. We set up WhatsApp groups, sent letters, ran advertising campaigns, and created instructional videos on how to put on PPE. We ran as much virtual training as we could, including mental health awareness.
>
> Carers tend to see it as their calling, and it's times like these that give them a chance to really shine. All of our carers have done an incredible job, and we've tried to show them that we recognise that. We've sent them engraved watches and medals as gifts, and every week, we've had our teams choose their hero of the branch to receive a bottle of champagne."

David Trowbridge
Director, Retain Healthcare

Building a support strategy

A year later, workforce fatigue has peaked and the long-term sustainability of people's wellbeing has become a concern.[9]

9| Maris Stratulis (British Association of Social Workers) https://www. communitycare.co.uk/2020/12/11/ coronavirus-75-social-workers-feeling-negativework-life-last-year-survey-finds/

Use data to understand employees' needs

In order to truly understand the unique mental health needs of their employees, employers can analyse trends using data from their medicals, disabilities, local compulsory psychosocial screenings, voluntary anonymous assessments, occupational health reports, health screenings and Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs).

The insights from these analyses can help employers evaluate the main behavioural issues among their workforce and implement the most appropriate programmes and resources.

Once mental health solutions are in place, data on the uptake and outcomes of those benefits should give organisations some insight into how well the programmes are working. However, it will not tell the whole story, particularly as many people still feel nervous about seeking help or may not be aware that any is available.

Continued promotion of programme offerings and campaigns to remove the stigma around the topic of mental health are essential for successful engagement.

Understand the unique medical needs of your population

Medical

Voluntary annonymous assessment

Employee Assistance Programme

Disability

Occupational health reports

Health screenings

Psychosocial screenings

A mental health strategy, tailored to the needs of your workforce

Organisations should consider tailoring programs to address the specific needs of their workforce across the spectrum of behavioural health, mental health, substance-use, disorder concerns and critical conditions such as suicide and violence.

Along with data analyses, active listening sessions can help employers determine what is best for their workforces. Conducting virtual or in-person focus groups, stakeholder interviews and surveys can help companies gain input on mental health needs. It should also be noted that minority groups bear a disproportionately high burden of disability resulting from mental health conditions.

" **A one-size-fits-all approach to mental health has never been optimal.**

Behavioural health/emotions

Stress, social interactions

Non-severe conditions

Mild depression and anxiety

Serious mental illness

Bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, severe depression & anxiety

Drug & substance abuse

Alcohol, drugs

Critical situations

Suicide, violence

Reduce the stigma around mental health

When employers equip managers and supervisors with the necessary skills, early warning signs of stress and mental health issues are identified earlier. Using leadership initiatives to advance the conversation can help to remove the barriers around talking about mental health.
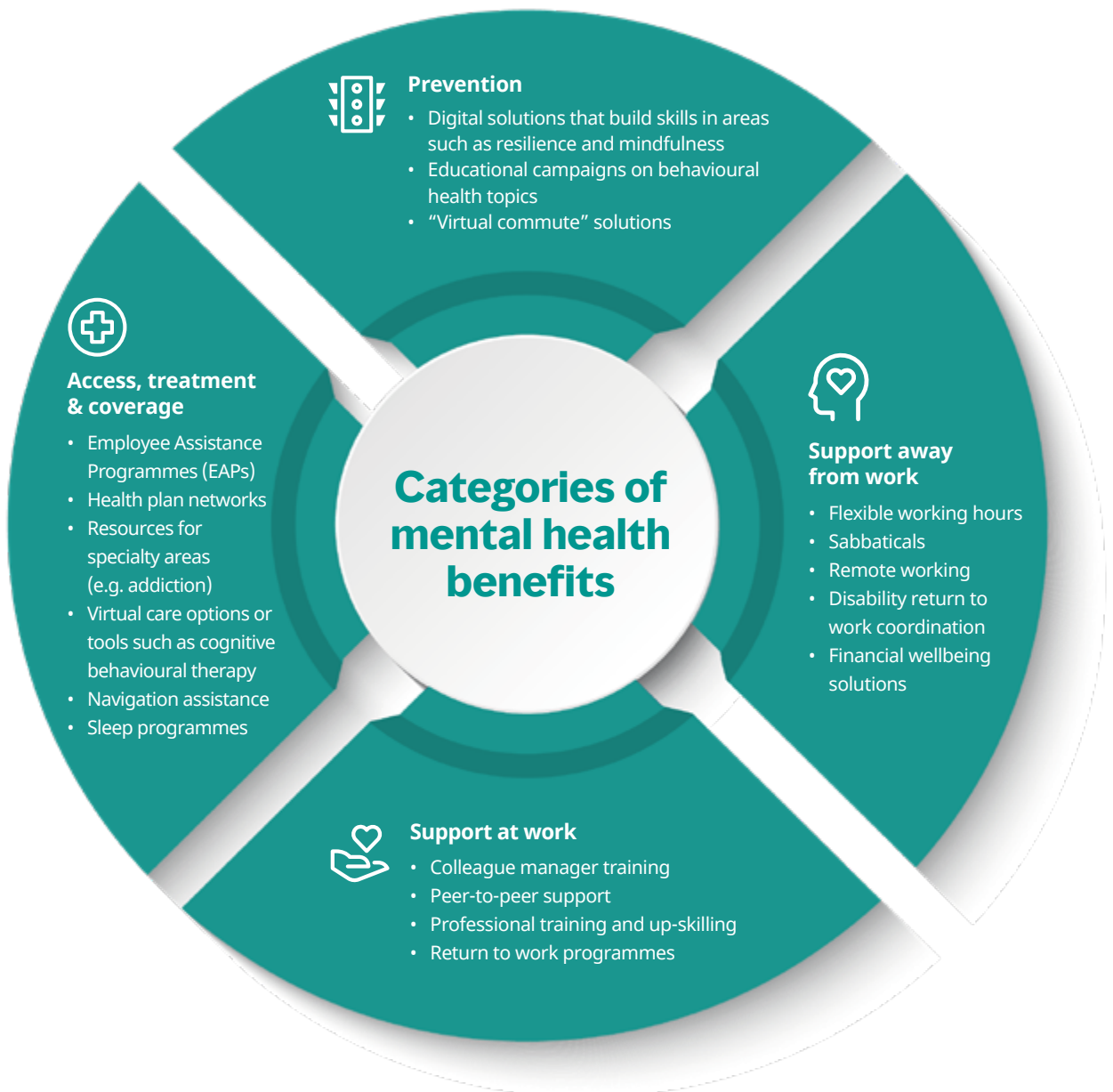
Manager training is a good place to start, as managers are best placed to notice when one of their team members might be depressed, stressed or even experiencing domestic violence. Training managers to properly discuss mental health helps reduce stigma in a company's culture. They are not expected to diagnose any mental health challenges — nor should they attempt to do so — but they should watch out for changes in behaviour, mood, productivity or engagement and use basic empathy skills to support the employee.

Training can be online, pre-recorded or live, face-to-face, or via a hybrid model where a training library is available as a central hub and complemented by live sessions. A well-structured communication strategy should complement this.

Categories of mental health benefits

Although the design and positioning of many of these programs vary from culture to culture, employers can offer four main categories of mental health benefits.

Prevention
- Digital solutions that build skills in areas such as resilience and mindfulness
- Educational campaigns on behavioural health topics
- "Virtual commute" solutions

Access, treatment & coverage
- Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs)
- Health plan networks
- Resources for specialty areas (e.g. addiction)
- Virtual care options or tools such as cognitive behavioural therapy
- Navigation assistance
- Sleep programmes

Categories of mental health benefits

Support away from work
- Flexible working hours
- Sabbaticals
- Remote working
- Disability return to work coordination
- Financial wellbeing solutions

Support at work
- Colleague manager training
- Peer-to-peer support
- Professional training and up-skilling
- Return to work programmes

The benefits of maintaining employee wellbeing

A thriving workforce

A recent "workplace mental wellbeing report" which surveyed 2,009 UK employees, found that 67% of those individuals who had struggled with their mental wellbeing had never told their employer; 23% felt too embarrassed, 24% believed their employer would be unable to help, and 19% thought it might jeopardise their career.

" Clearly there are still significant barriers preventing employees from talking about their mental wellbeing to their employers, and this needs to change.

Culture is key here. Employers need to work to create safe spaces where their employees feel comfortable talking about mental health and wellbeing, both good and bad experiences, allowing employees to bring their full selves to work. However, it is also important that workplaces have the support structures and initiatives in place.

Every workplace is different, and different teams may need different initiatives to support them. Therefore, it is vital that employers listen to their employees and understand what works best for them."

Sophie Holland
Senior Research Executive, Opinium

The pandemic has brought to light just how important the nation's frontline workers are to employers, service-users and to the families of people in care. People are the most important resource for healthcare providers who endeavour to achieve a multitude of ambitious targets. Businesses who prioritise the review or introduction of a mental health strategy will have healthier and more engaged staff – which in turn boosts productivity.

" Mental wellbeing is about thriving, not just surviving. Employees with good mental wellbeing feel good and function well. Quantifying mental wellbeing helps organisations to focus on what [it is] doing right. Tracking scores over time highlights effective strategies and promotes wider understanding of mental wellbeing."[10]

Sarah Stewart-Brown
Spokesperson at the University of Warwick

Taking proactive steps to create a more open and supportive culture will, over time, see staff begin to feel more confident to talk to managers about their mental health.

10| https://employeebenefits.co.uk/
four-fifths-poor-mental-wellbeing/

Staff who stay

In healthcare, retaining staff is just as important as attracting new talent. Healthcare is well known for low retention of staff, attributed to a number of factors including poor induction and training, long hours leading to burnout, budget cuts and a perceived lack of opportunities for progression.

The rate of employee turnover in the adult social care sector was estimated to be 30.4% in 2019/20. 66% of these people stayed in healthcare, taking different roles in the same organisation or moving to another healthcare employer. That's waround 430,000 workers creating churn within the industry. The remaining 35% left the industry altogether. The number of people leaving their roles in healthcare is double the UK average, which is thought to be around 15%.

Showing appreciation for the hard work of your employees helps them feel their work has a sense of purpose and that they are valued. Often, in difficult times, a kind word or small act of recognition can have a big impact on an employee's outlook.

Better use of budget

Employers that practice reward and recognition in the workplace should expect to see reduced turnover rates and absenteeism levels due to employees feeling more appreciated and placing a higher importance on the work they do. Furthermore, it has been shown that reward and recognition contributes to more engaged employees who are motivated with higher productivity levels and quality of work.

Employee benefits are a cost-effective way to reward employees fairly, across all areas of your business. Providing a new workplace benefit demonstrates to employees that the business is invested in their physical, mental, financial and social wellbeing.

Promoting and educating staff on their benefits is a perfect way to engage employees throughout the year. For example, alerting staff that complimentary flu jabs are available in the autumn, promoting the cycle-to-work scheme in the spring and perhaps reminding them of the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) during difficult periods.

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To learn more about employee health and benefits for your workplace, contact theHealth and Care team on **0113 350 8712.**

For more information visit:
www.marshcommercial.co.uk/ for-business/care/