



National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence

Tel: 0845 003 7782
www.nice.org.uk

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PRESS RELEASE

New NICE public health guidance aims to improve mental wellbeing within the workplace

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has today (5 November) issued guidance for employers on promoting mental wellbeing at work through productive and healthy working conditions. The guidance aims to help reduce the estimated 13.7 million working days lost each year due to work-related mental health conditions including stress, depression and anxiety which are currently estimated to cost UK employers around £28.3 billion per year at current pay levels.

Work has an important role in promoting mental wellbeing. It can not only help develop an individual's self-esteem and sense of identity but also helps to provide a sense of fulfilment and opportunities for social interaction. However when the pressure of work exceeds an employee's ability to cope it can have negative effects on the employee's mental health, particularly in the form of stress.

The NICE guidance highlights how employers and employees can work in partnership to improve mental wellbeing within the workplace, by taking a positive organisation-wide approach that promotes mental wellbeing through changes in ways of working, such as improved line management and the provision of flexible working where appropriate. These recommendations will not only benefit employees but will also help employers to reduce sickness absence and staff turnover leading to increased productivity and performance.

Professor Mike Kelly, Public Health Excellence Centre Director, NICE said "The benefits of promoting mental wellbeing within the workplace are clear. Today's guidance explains how employers can make simple changes which will improve the

management of mental health in the workplace, including the prevention and early identification of problems. The financial incentives for employers adopting these approaches are significant however measures such as the performing of annual audits of employee wellbeing are not common practice. By following these recommendations an average organisation of 1000 employees can expect to save an estimated £250 000 a year, due to reduced absenteeism and increased performance. The guidance therefore represents a win-win for employers and their employees and should be seen as important advice to help organisations irrespective of their size or sector.”

Recommendations made for employers in organisations of all sizes include:

- Promote a culture of participation, equality and fairness that is based on open communication and inclusion.
- Create an awareness and understanding of mental wellbeing and reduce the potential for discrimination and stigma related to mental health problems.
- Ensure systems are in place for assessing and monitoring the mental wellbeing of employees so that areas for improvement can be identified and risks caused by work and working conditions addressed. This could include using employee attitude surveys and information about absence rates, staff turnover and investment in training and development, and providing feedback and open communication.
- If reasonably practical, provide employees with opportunities for flexible working according to their needs and aspirations in both their personal and working lives. Different options for flexible working include part-time working, home-working, job sharing and flexitime.
- Strengthen the role of line managers in promoting the mental wellbeing of employees through supportive leadership style and management practices.

Recommendations made for professionals working in occupational health services along with those involved in national initiatives and programmes from government and the Federation of Small Businesses include:

- Collaborate with micro, small and medium-sized businesses and offer advice and a range of support and services. This could include access to

occupational health services (including counselling support and stress management training).

Dame Carol Black, National Director for Health and Work said: “The newly released NICE guidance on the promotion of mental wellbeing at work provides clear, practical advice applicable to the public, private and voluntary sectors, with relevance to organisations both large and small. It is an excellent resource for the increasing number of employers who understand the need to create healthy workplaces which promote mental well-being, for the benefit of employees and their families. The guidance explains how best to build that positive environment.”

Sian Thomas, Director of NHS Employers, said: “Tackling mental ill health in the NHS workplace is good for the individuals concerned and can also have a positive impact on the diversity and productivity of the workforce, ultimately improving the patient experience.

NHS Employers is committed to helping NHS organisations support staff with mental health problems and encouraging trusts to employ more staff from this vulnerable group. Later this year we will be launching our *Open Your Mind* campaign on mental health and employment to reduce mental health stigma and help employers to create a better working environment for staff with mental health problems.”

Professor Susan Michie, Professor of Health Psychology at the BPS Centre for Outcomes Research and Effectiveness at University College London and member of the Public Health Interventions Advisory Committee at NICE said: “Workplace mental wellbeing is important both for staff and the organisation’s productivity. Some of the key features relevant to all employers include the need to provide employees with the necessary levels of support, praise, control over their work and constructive feedback. The guidance also highlights the need for good communication between employees and their managers and the need to treat people as valued individuals.”

Professor Cary Cooper, Professor of Organisational Psychology and Health Professor at the Lancaster University Management School said: “The NICE guidance is an extremely important contribution to enhancing mental wellbeing in the workplace, It is consistent with, and reinforces, the evidence-based findings of the major government Foresight project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing, and the work carried out in the EU over the last ten years. This NICE guidance is an innovative,

far-reaching and significant piece of work that will help to minimise workplace stress and promote mental wellbeing at work.”

Dr Richard Preece, Consultant in Occupational Medicine at Mid Cheshire

Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust said: “All managers know that happy workers are productive workers. The evidence confirms that promoting mental well-being is win-win, helping both workers and the bottom line.

Even in the best workplaces people still suffer mental health issues. My patients have access to occupational health support but more often this isn't the case. This guidance emphasises the need for occupational health services to be made more accessible to everyone working or seeking work.”

Ends

For more information call the NICE press office on 0845 003 7782 or out of hours on 07775 583 813.

Notes to Editors

About the guidance

1. The guidance “Promoting mental wellbeing through productive and healthy working conditions: guidance for employers” is available at: www.nice.org.uk/PH22
2. Welcoming the guidance, Dr Tony Stevens, President of the Society of Occupational Medicine said: “This important new guidance builds on the business context, recognising the value of effective management at all levels in organisations. Mental wellbeing is a key corporate governance issue relevant to all employment sectors. Occupational Health Teams are crucial in that they can effectively support managers in delivering this challenging agenda set out by NICE.”

About NICE

3. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is the independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention and treatment of ill health.
4. NICE produces guidance in three areas of health:
 - **public health** – guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention of ill health for those working in the NHS, local authorities and the wider public and voluntary sector
 - **health technologies** – guidance on the use of new and existing medicines, treatments and procedures within the NHS
 - **clinical practice** – guidance on the appropriate treatment and care of people with specific diseases and conditions within the NHS.