



Managing Mental Health in the Work Place

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Mental health, needless to say, is a universal resource for individuals, organizations and society as a whole. Like physical health, we all have mental health and at times, challenges in life can affect our resilience, causing harm to our mental health. Poor mental health is one of the biggest issues in the workplace today, causing over 70 million working days to be lost each year.¹ This includes everything from the most commonly experienced symptoms of stress and anxiety, right through to more complex mental health issues, viz. depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, substance abuse and obsessive compulsive disorder. Due to advances in technology, today work is no longer restricted to the workplace. Smart phones allow employees to be contactable 24/7, causing office to be in the palm of the hands, when it is really harder and harder to escape from work completely, which impacts further on our performance and total well being.

Poor mental health, it is noted that, also has severe repercussions for employers including increased staff turnover, sickness absence, burnout and exhaustion, decreased motivations and lost productivity. Again, Depression, although it is predicted to become the leading cause of burden by 2030, even in developed countries only half are in treatment protocol.²

A common cause of people not disclosing was fear or experience of discrimination or harassment, showing that we still have some distance to travel in addressing stigma.³ Considering these issues, now globally, experts on hospital economics and human resource professionals are emphasizing the well being of employees to maximize the opportunities to recruit, tap into and retain talent.

The U. K. based Mental Health Foundation,⁴ noted some common signs, which can help the employers and managers to identify the mental health problems-

- **Emotional:** irritable, sensitive to criticism, loss of confidence, loss of sense of humour.
- **Cognitive:** making more mistakes, problems in making decisions, poor concentration, sudden unexplained drop in performance.
- **Behavioural:** late arrival, not taking office lunch break, unofficial time off, not joining office banter, not hitting deadlines, more introvert/extroverted.
- **Physical:** constant cold, tired, rapid weight loss or gain.
- **Business:** increased absence, working long hours, drop in motivation, drop of productivity.

The researchers opine that the work-force, in its truest sense, if considered as 'Social Capital' and 'Human' resources', it is a priority to ensure good mental health in work places, emphasizing good basic line management relationships, clear HR policy and engagement of staff in a decision making.

In summary, to safeguard the mental health of our workplace it is imperative to formulate some practical ways, and considering 'prevention' as key, we need to enable everyone to flourish, those in distress to access help quickly, and those who have recovered from mental health problems to stay well and enjoy successful careers.

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To elaborate, we need furthermore-^{5,6}

- To create a culture of openness and awareness by encouraging people to talk about mental health in work places.
- To encourage regular breaks in work place.
- To review job descriptions to make sure that, these are set on clear and realistic expectations of staff.
- To make positive communication.
- To train up management, so that managers spend time with staff and know them.
- To intervene, when problem occur, ensuring internal support and outside help.
- To develop a tailored and phased return to work plan to help employees ease back into the work place.

References:

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