

Managing Stress and Improving Employee Health & Wellbeing Guidance

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1.0 Introduction

Stress is a natural reaction to excessive demand or pressure. Our bodies are well adapted to cope with short term stress, but if pressure is prolonged, too frequent or out of our control, the stress reactions in our body can become chronic and can lead to ill health. A controllable level of pressure is healthy and leads to improved motivation and job satisfaction. In contrast, harmful excessive stress can be damaging.

This guidance sets out NHS East and North Hertfordshire, NHS Herts Valleys, and NHS West Essex Clinical Commissioning Groups (respectively referred to as 'the CCG') aims and objectives in relation to stress at work, in accordance with the duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, and the Equality Act 2010.

The CCG as an employer places high value on maintaining a healthy and safe environment for all its employees, and seeks to minimise the causes of stress in the workplace through the risk assessment process. This guidance is, therefore, primarily concerned with stress arising from the workplace. However it is recognised that stress may be influenced by a variety of factors and that no single cause may necessarily be identified.

The CCG will make every effort to support staff in managing stress irrespective of its source. The CCG is committed to ensuring the health, safety and welfare of all its employees. The CCG is also committed to enhancing the total wellbeing of its employees and recognises that an effective organisation comprises a workforce that both feels well and is well managed. Stress in the workplace can be a major factor in reduced staff performance, commitment and motivation, increased sickness absence, loss of productivity and general absenteeism. The CCG is committed to identifying sources of stress in the workplace and taking action to reduce harmful stress.

The difference between pressure and stress is the moment the individual begins to feel out of control and unable to do what is being asked of them which leads to unwanted and damaging mental and physical symptoms.

2.0 Definition of Stress

The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as: 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them'.

3.0 Aim

Through the implementation of this guidance the CCG aims to:

- Assess the risk of stress-related ill-health arising from work activities (Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999);
- To take measures to control the risk of stress-related ill-health arising from work activities (Health & Safety at Work etc. Act 1974);
- Engender a climate which encourages personal responsibility in the recognition and management of stress-related ill-health and promote the management of stress as a way of maintaining a healthy workplace;
- Contribute to supporting staff in periods of change;
- Reduce the rate of sickness absence from stress related illness.

4.0 Potential Causes of Workplace Stress

The HSE identifies the following potential causes of workplace stress in accordance with the HSE management standards:

- **Demands:** Examples are workload and exposure to physical hazards or difficult situations;
- **Control:** How much say the individual has in the way they carry out their work;
- **Support:** Support from peers, colleagues and managers;
- **Relationships:** Relationships with colleagues, and issues such as bullying and harassment;
- **Role:** Whether the individual understands their role in the organisation and if they have conflicting roles or role demands;
- **Change:** The way organisational change is managed and communicated in the organisation.

5.0 Approach

The CCG is committed to assessing the risk of and taking measures to control stress in the workplace. Staff involvement and consultation is embedded throughout the guidance development systems within the CCG. The identification of unhealthy stressors and possible gaps in support structures follows a risk management process, with the aid of the stress management toolkit, which can be found in appendices of this guide, and more general risk management processes.

The outcomes of the hazard identification processes will lead to stakeholder development of solutions, as with the general risk management process it will include monitoring and audit for effectiveness.

The following list, although not exhaustive, identifies the vast majority of measures that can be used, however other means may be used as they are identified:

- a. CCG risk assessments - carried out by manager and used to identify groups of staff who may be affected, through the use of assessment tool, which can be found in appendix 3;
- b. Encouragement of managers to manage the causes and effects of stress;
- c. Occupational Health and HR & ODL Shared Service;
- d. Personal Risk assessments carried out by affected employee and manager through the use of a toolkit, which can be found in appendix 3;
- e. Encouragement of employees to recognise potential stressors and inform their managers of such;
- f. Provision of free access to an independent, confidential counselling service;
- g. Monitoring of sickness absence reasons and statistics, via the workforce information monthly sickness reports;
- h. Incident and near miss reporting - used to highlight increases in accidents and near misses, and thus potential causes of stress in the workplace.
- i. Return to work interviews
- j. Incidences of bullying, harassment, grievances - HR monitor all such casework and are able to isolate incidence rates and patterns of incidences.
- k. Exit interview process - monitor exit questionnaires and are able to identify reasons staff give for leaving and any other issues identified which may be stress-related.
- l. Staff turnover statistics - regular review figures on staff turnover and isolate whether turnover is high in some areas without obvious reason.
- m. Appraisals and Key Skills Framework
- n. Occupational Health referral and feedback.
- o. Ensuring that support policies are in place and available to all staff to assist in the management of stress. E.g. Health & Safety Policies and Procedure, Equality and Diversity Policy, Raising Concerns (Whistleblowing) Policy, Attendance Management & Wellbeing Policy, Bullying and Harassment Policy.
- p. Ensuring that working practices are regularly reviewed and monitored in accordance with the CCG's Flexible Working Policy and within the constraints of the service to ensure that staff are able to achieve a healthy balance between working and home life;
- q. Feedback to the senior management team;
- r. Ensuring that there is a clear and effective organisational structure to enable staff to know who they are accountable to and where they should go if they have a problem or need support.

6.0 Duties and Responsibilities

6.1 Role of the Employee

Employees have a duty to take care of their own health and safety at work and need to have an awareness of their own feelings and reactions to stressful situations and their personal methods of coping. To discharge these responsibilities all employees:

- Should take all reasonable steps to ensure that they do not cause unnecessary stress to others;
- Are encouraged to have the confidence to raise issues of concern and express their views to colleagues and line managers with regard to potential stressors in the workplace;
- Have a duty to report any problems they may be facing, be it illness or injury, stress-related or otherwise, which they feel may be caused or exacerbated by work. If such issues are not highlighted to management, then managers will not be able to manage the issue.
- Should, when unable to cope with excessive stress, co-operate with any management referral to and support offered through the Occupational Health Service and/or self-refer to the counselling service, if appropriate;
- Should attend any training or activities offered in the recognition and management of excessive stress.

6.2 Role of the Line Manager

Line managers at all levels have an important role to play in the management of stress at work, as well as their individual responsibility as an employee they have responsibility to staff in their charge, managers should therefore comply with the HSE management standards by;

- Ensure that staff are fully trained to discharge their duties, and ensure that staff attend mandatory training;
- Monitor workloads to ensure that employees are not overloaded, and monitor working hours to ensure that members of staff are not overworking. Managers should ensure that employees are taking their full holiday entitlement;
- Ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated within their team and deal with any conflict in a timely manner;
- Create a team culture where staff are supported to raise issues;
- Conduct and implement recommendations of risk assessments within their teams;
- Encourage wherever possible, open communication between managers and staff, particularly where there may be organisational and/or procedural changes;
- Provide appropriate referral to Occupational Health Services and involve HR for further support and advice if work related stress is identified as a problem or is a reason for sickness absence;
- Carry out regular supervision and annual appraisal with their staff;
- Conduct annual appraisals and objective setting to ensure staff are aware of their duties in accordance with the CCG Appraisal Policy and Procedure;

- Offer additional support to any staff that are experiencing stress outside of work (e.g. bereavement, divorce).

6.3 Role of the Occupational Health Service

- To provide support to staff and advice to managers on the management of ill-health, including instances where absence may be due to a stress-related reason, and where this may have resulted in absence or poor performance;
- To provide appropriate advice on reasonable adjustments and redeployment to facilitate an employee to return to the workplace in order to avoid a recurrence of the problem;
- To signpost employees to the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) counselling service as required;
- Participate where appropriate in training activities on the issue of stress management, offered as part of a rolling plan of HR training on the subject of management of attendance.

6.4 Role of Human Resources

- Provide continuing support to managers and employees in the management of ill-health cases and referrals to the Occupational Health service;
- To give guidance and support on the CCG Attendance Management Policy and other related policies;
- Assist in monitoring the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating sickness absence statistics.

7.0 Identification of Work-Related Stressors

The following information may be reviewed as appropriate to identify potential stressors in the workplace:

- Staff Surveys
- Sickness absence reports and reasons for absence
- Grievances
- 360 feedback
- Work related stress risk assessment tool
- Team meetings
- Exit interviews

8.0 Well-being at Work

The management of stress at work forms part of the organisation's overall management of well-being at work. The CCG is taking positive steps to manage stress and increase well-being at work.

9.0 Risk Assessment

Where an individual is showing signs of stress, an individual stress risk assessment should be carried out for them, using the form in appendix 3.

Managers should allow any work related stressors to be managed effectively and reduced; assistance and support should also be given to allow the individual to deal with any external sources of stress, whether these are short or longer term.

Regular review meetings between the manager and the individual must be held to ensure appropriate support is being provided and agreed actions being taken. The regularity of the meetings should be agreed between the manager and the individual as different situations will require a greater regularity of meetings than others.

10.0 Management of Stress related Absence

When managing any absence which is stress-related, managers must be consistent and follow the agreed absence management procedure as clearly laid out in the Attendance Management and Wellbeing Policy. In particular, managers should be aware that increased or more frequent absence may indicate an underlying stress problem.

Managers should use the opportunity of return to work interviews to discuss any stress-related problems when appropriate. Where an absence is stress-related, or thought likely to be, an early referral to Occupational Health is essential, in order to provide as much support to the employee as possible. Managers should seek advice from the OD & HR team or Occupational Health if in any doubt.

Appendix 1 – Internal and External Support

Internal Support Details

Occupational Health

The contact details for each CCG's Occupational Health Service is as follows:

- East & North Herts CCG - 01438 286 514 or healthatwork.enh-tr@nhs.net.
- Herts Valleys CCG - 01582 497226 or tracy.nagle@ldh.nhs.uk.
- West Essex – Tel: 01268 524900 ext.3591 or occupationalhealth@btuh.nhs.uk

Further details are available on HR and ODL Shared Service Intranet at <http://hrodlintranet/SitePages/occhealth.aspx>

Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)

The following CCG's operate an employee assistance/staff support programme (EAP):

- East & North Herts CCG - 0800 328 1437 or <http://www.employeeassistance.org.uk> using password: enhertscg
- Herts Valleys CCG - 0800 328 1437 or <http://www.employeeassistance.org.uk> using password: Hertsvalleys
- West Essex CCG – 0800 328 1437 or <http://www.employeeassistance.org.uk> using password: WestEssex

The EAP services provide telephone, internet and face to face assistance across a range of work and non-work related matters.

Further details are available on the HR and ODL Shared Service Intranet at <http://hrodlintranet/SitePages/occhealth.aspx>

External Support Organisations

1. Alcohol

- Alcoholics Anonymous: 0800 9177 650 <http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/>
- Drink Aware: <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/>

2. Bereavement

- Cot Death Helpline: <http://www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk/> 0800 282 986
- Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society (SANDS): 0808 164 3332
<https://www.sands.org.uk/>
- Cruse – Bereavement Care:

National: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/>

Helplines

0808 808 1677

Hertfordshire: <http://www.cruse-hertfordshire.org.uk/>

01707 278389

West Essex: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/local-services/eastern-england/essex>

0845 2669710

3. Debt

- National Debtline: 0808 808 4000 <http://www.nationaldebtline.co.uk/>

4. Divorced and Separated

- National Family Mediation: <http://www.nfm.org.uk/>

5. Domestic Violence

- Women's Aid National Helpline: 0808 2000 247
<https://www.womensaid.org.uk>
- Men's Advice Line: 0808 801 0327
http://www.mensadvice.org.uk/mens_advice.php

6. Drugs

- Release: 020 7324 2989 <http://www.release.org.uk/>
- Frank: 0300 123 6600 <http://www.talktofrank.com/>
- Narcotics Anonymous: 0300 999 1212 <http://www.ukna.org/>

7. Other useful contacts

- NHS Choices: <http://www.nhs.uk/Pages/HomePage.aspx>
- British Heart Foundation: 0300 330 3311 (Mon-Fri 9-5pm)
<https://www.bhf.org.uk/>
- Samaritans: Helpline - 116 123 (24hrs per day). Web -
<http://www.samaritans.org/>
- Citizens Advice Bureau: <http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>
- Rethink: 0300 5000 927 (Mon-Fri 9.30am - 4pm) <http://www.rethink.org/>
- MIND: Mind infoline: 0300 123 3393 <http://www.mind.org.uk/Text> 86463
- Gamblers Anonymous <http://www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk/>

Appendix 2 – Health and Safety Executive five steps to the risk assessment of Stress

Step 1 - Identify the hazards

Use “Are you doing enough? Supporting Staff and Tackling Work Related Stress” to identify areas for action under each of the six management standards (demands, control, support, relationships, role and change). Involve the individuals or teams concerned in this.

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/pdfs/suggestions.pdf>

Step 2 - Decide who might be harmed and how

Monitor individuals and teams for the presence of stressors and the effects of stress, for example during appraisal, sickness absence review and team or one-to-one meetings, considering both the numbers of instances of stress related absences and the total number of days lost.

See also “Managing Stress: A guide for managing stress in teams” for the identification of stress in individuals and teams.

- Where stress is identified in a team, use of risk assessment is indicated.
- Where stress is identified in an individual, work with the individual to agree actions, make a note of these and follow them up.

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg424.pdf>

Step 3 – Evaluate the risk and take action

Work with the individuals/groups concerned and their representatives to identify potential solutions and to prioritise action. This could be through focus groups or team meetings.

Use “Are you doing enough? Supporting Staff and Tackling Work Related Stress” to help identify areas for action.

Draw up recommendations in the form of a prioritised action plan and make sure that staff are aware of it.

Step 4 – Record your findings

Record the results. If the stress is related to an individual, it would be appropriate to record this on the file or in a letter to them. If the stress relates to a team, this should be recorded on the risk assessment by adding the action plan and dates for action. A copy of any stress risk assessment should be sent to the Health and Safety Manager for central monitoring.

Step 5 – Monitor and review

Periodically monitor against the action plan to ensure that the agreed actions are taking place, and evaluate the effectiveness of the solutions that are implemented.

Where work related stress causes leads to sickness absence, the CCG’s sickness absence policy and procedure will be followed.

Appendix 3 – Work Related Stress Risk Assessment

| | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| Name of Employee: | Job Title: |
| Department: | Name of Assessor: |
| Date: | Date of Assessment: |

The following form gives some common examples and potential solutions, which should be adjusted as appropriate to fit the circumstances and to reflect what is reasonable and practicable in the circumstances.

| <u>Example</u> Contributing risk factors (please amend as appropriate) | Yes | No | <u>Suggested</u> control measures to be introduced (please amend as appropriate) | Initials & Date Actioned: |
|---|------------|-----------|---|--|
| Excessive workload or overwork evident following discussion with employee | | | Eliminate some of the task Redesign the task Provide more resource/delegate work Ensure staff adequately trained Set/agree realistic targets Time management training | |
| Work cannot be planned effectively as objectives frequently change | | | Redesign the task Agree objectives When new tasks introduced review objectives and agree new priorities. Employee to be involved in decision process. Time Management Training | |
| Work deadlines change frequently | | | Review objectives and agree new priorities Employee to be involved in decision process Plan tasks in advance – review plans Time management training | |
| Employee cannot structure work | | | Redesign the task Review objectives and agree new priorities | |

| | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| | | | Plan tasks in advance – review plans Time management training | |
| Poor time management | | | Time Management Training Manager to assist with time management – short term solution | |
| Insufficient skills for the task/lack of training | | | Provide relevant training | |
| Insufficient challenge for the employee – boredom | | | Redesign the task (the member of staff should be encouraged to undertake this action) | |
| Long hours culture | | | Clarify expectations on hours, consider solutions, eg consider implementing email curfew if appropriate | |
| Poor working environment | | | Redesign workstation, improve lighting, improve flooring, improve housekeeping etc. | |
| Bullying, sexism, racism | | | Implement local procedures for these issues and ensure employee is supported | |
| Lack of resources to undertake the work effectively | | | Redesign task Delegate work Review resource allocation | |
| Inability to affect change or respond to change | | | Review roles, responsibilities and boundaries Consult staff during decision making process. | |

Notes:

Referral to Occupational Health/ Health and Safety Manager:

Additional Support arrangements:

Employee signature:

Date:

Assessor signature:

Date:

Appendix 4 – Managing identified individual cases of Work Related Stress (WRS)

Some of the common indicators of stress in employees are:

- Increased absenteeism
- A negative change in mood or behaviour (e.g. more irritable, or withdrawn)
- Deterioration in relationships with colleagues
- Longer hours being worked with no additional achievement
- Cancelled annual leave
- Loss of concentration
- Indecisiveness
- Making more mistakes
- Unable to meet deadlines
- Reluctance to face up to or prioritise difficult tasks
- Reliance on e.g. smoking, alcohol or other substance use
- Teams may show increased negativity, inflexibility to minor change, and decline in work outputs and effectiveness.

The cause may be a single particularly stressful event, or the result of an accumulation of events that of themselves may not have resulted in WRS. Problems at home can also make work stressful. Managers may need to take professional advice e.g. from Occupational Health or Staff from the Psychological and Welfare Service to make an assessment of what is going on.

Managers should be alert to signs of stress in their ward / department workforce. Opportunities to identify stress include:

- First day absence reporting
- Return to work interview following sickness absence
- Routine individual 1:1 meetings
- Team meetings (in relation to the functioning of the team as a whole)
- The annual appraisal and personal development planning sessions

Where an individual employee raises a concern about WRS, or the manager raises such a concern with an individual, this should be done with sensitivity and in private. The employee should be reassured that the discussion will be in the confidence offered by this policy and that they will be supported. The manager should listen to the employee's concerns and explore the factors that may have given rise to the WRS. If the employee denies that they are stressed, the manager should still ensure the situation is monitored. If the stress is personal (see below) this should be considered in the context of the impact of the work on the employee's situation.

A form is provided in the Appendix that may be used to assess the risk to individual employees as part of a risk assessment for a ward / department or where an individual concern has been identified. Completion of the form is voluntary, and once completed is confidential to the individual and their manager / Occupational Health.

Where an employee is suffering from stress a course of action should be agreed with them and the outcome monitored. Advice may be sought from Occupational Health, or Staff from the Psychological and Welfare Service as appropriate as to the most appropriate course of action.

Immediate actions may be required e.g. a referral to Occupational Health, or agreement to a period of absence. A risk assessment of the work – related issues should be carried out, within a reasonable timescale (10 working days is recommended as a standard). Solutions should be generated and actions agreed in consultation with the employee.

Where a stress-related illness amounts to a disability under the Equality Act 2010, the manager must take steps to make reasonable adjustments to the employee's work. For this to apply, the impairment has to have a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the individual's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. The employee will have to show that they have significant physical and mental ill-health as a result of the perceived stress. They will also have to show that they have sought and received appropriate treatment. The opinion of Occupational Health should be sought in such cases.

It is not the responsibility of the CCG to prevent stress caused by problems in employees' personal lives, such as relationship breakdown, bereavement or debt. If, however, an employee is known to be having problems outside work, the manager should take this into account as it could make them more vulnerable at work, and determine if reasonable adjustments can be made to their work for a period of time to enable them to cope more successfully.

Factors at work

To consider the contribution work may be making to any stress felt by an employee, it is worth asking the following questions:

- Is there any difficulty coping with any particular task at work? If so, does this highlight any particular training needs, for example computer operating skills for new systems at work?
- Is the amount of work required felt to be excessive or the organisation of the work inappropriate in any way?
- Have any difficulties been identified with interactions with colleagues? Is there any evidence of harassment or discrimination towards a particular employee from either a patient or another member of staff?
- Does the individual consider there to be any difficulties interacting with the public and, in particular, with patients?

Appendix 5 – On-line Resources

| Name | Overview | Web link |
|---|--|--|
| HSE – suggested actions related to the work place stressors | Suggested actions related to the work place stressors | http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/pdfs/suggestions.pdf?ebul=stress&cr=01/sep11 |
| HSE – Focus Groups | Suggested advice on how to organise and run focus groups | http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/pdfs/focusgroups.pdf |
| HSE Is my risk assessment approach suitable and sufficient? | Equivalence checklist from HSE | http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/assets/docs/checklist.pdf |
| HSE Risk assessment website | Details of how to undertake a risk assessment HSE Five Steps to risk assessment | http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/fivesteps.htm http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf |
| NHS Choices | A workplace stress self-assessment tool that links responses to questions to further information on areas identified | http://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/Workplacestress.aspx?Tag http://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/Toolslibrary.aspx?Tag=Mental+health |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| | as stressors Five tools linked to mental health | |
| ACAS | ACAS: Dealing with Stress in the Workplace | http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=6062 |
| NHS Employers | An overview of stress management in the NHS | http://www.nhsemployers.org/case-studies-and-resources/2014/11/guidance-on-the-prevention-and-management-of-stress-in-the-workplace |
| ISMA (International Stress Management Association) | Further information and resources for stress management | https://isma.org.uk/ |