

## INDUSTRY INSIGHT



With staff spending a quarter of their adult lives at work, the underlying health of your employees must be of critical importance to an organisation, as time off work is costly, says **Raman Sankaran**, director of strategic development at HealthSure

## Stress has clear impact

For the majority of people, the workplace is an important feature of their daily routine, with most individuals spending up to 25% of their adult lives at work.

While work can help to provide self-worth, purpose, structure and fulfilment, it can also be the cause of anxiety, worry and stress.

Around half a million people in the UK experience work-related stress at a level they believe is making them ill, and up to five million feel very or extremely stressed by their work.

Of course, everyone is under some level of stress in the workplace and a certain amount of pressure can help many employees to be more productive as their bodies react positively to meet the short-term demands of stress.

However, excessive and prolonged stress can take its toll on physical and mental wellbeing, resulting in a range of health problems, including heart disease, back pain and gastrointestinal problems.

At the same time, the cost of work-related stress is at its highest level ever, with stress-related sickness absence

costing British industry more than £3.7bn a year. And this only takes into account those employees who actually admit to feeling under pressure.

Under the Health and Safety Act 1974, employers have a legal duty to ensure employees are not made ill through their work and this includes stress. But not managing the problem is not just a legal requirement, failure to tackle stress-related absence can also result in high staff turnover, reduced work performance and an increase in sickness absence. The absence of an individual through stress-related illness can also contribute to increased pressure on staff left covering an absent colleague's work.

This increase in stress and pressure for others can create a vicious circle, leading to further ill health or the eventual resignation of valuable members of staff.

There is also a very real danger that organisations that don't consider the effects of workplace stress can leave themselves open to the threat of compensation claims.

With stress having a clear impact on

companies of all sizes and industries, it is becoming a necessity to develop a healthier business environment, including appropriate and robust products, processes and frameworks.

An increasing number of organisations are adopting employee assistance programmes (EAPs), embracing flexible-working policies and introducing wellbeing initiatives to help prevent work-related absence.

A healthcare cash plan is another cost effective, accessible and relevant employee benefit that can help reduce stress in the workplace. These are increasingly being sought by a variety of businesses across all industries, ranging from larger organisations to small and medium-sized enterprises. Starting at very low costs and often including EAP facilities, cash plans can also help organisations proactively address Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidelines and their duty of care obligations.

Clearly, workplace stress is something all organisations should look to manage and with the right strategy, both the employer and its employees can be protected.

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