

supplement

**employee
benefits**

May 2016

workplace health strategies





Editor's comment



Debbie Lovewell-Tuck | Editor
Employee Benefits

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Employee health and wellbeing is now firmly on the business agenda. The days of simply offering private medical insurance, perhaps complemented by a health cash plan, are long gone as employers increasingly look to support, and engage with, employees' holistic health and wellbeing needs.

Instead, the role employers have to play in supporting the health of the workforce, along with recognition of the advantages of doing so, continues to rise in importance.

This only looks set to develop further. Several trends that are starting to emerge from the US could radically alter UK employers' health and wellbeing strategies. For example, some UK organisations have added genetic testing to their workplace health and wellbeing propositions to test for certain cancer and cardiac risks, or to engage staff with lifestyle issues such as fitness and nutrition.

Elsewhere, UK employers could follow the trend currently building in the US by introducing sleep management to their health and wellbeing strategies. A person's sleep habits can affect their concentration and productivity levels, so addressing these can directly benefit employers.

In some cases, the benefits offered by

employers may also have advantages that extend beyond the obvious. Ensuring these are fully realised and optimised can therefore benefit employers greatly. With proven links between poor oral health and kidney disease, for example, dental benefits can be used far more strategically to identify, and in some cases go some way toward mitigating the risk of serious conditions or diseases developing.

Optical benefits, meanwhile, can help to detect conditions such as diabetes.

Strategies are also being shaped by changing demographics, as well as shifting employee expectations. The rise of the multi-generational workforce encompassing five different generations, for example, means employers face a more diverse range of health issues and needs than ever.

As both employers' and employees' requirements and expectations evolve, the pressure is on benefits providers to do the same. As a result, the past few years have seen a great deal of development across all sections of the healthcare and wellbeing market, particularly in the technological space. I fully expect that we will see this trend continue.

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Support mechanisms come bearing fruit

Organisations need to adapt to embrace the latest thinking in workplace health and wellbeing



Sam Barrett |
Freelance journalist

Workplace health and wellbeing

programmes aim to make employees healthier, happier and more productive. But, as well as evolving to reflect the latest thinking in health and wellbeing, these programmes can also adapt to help address the key challenges that organisations are facing.

For many employers, one of the most significant challenges they are facing is the ageing workforce. Government figures published by The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology in October 2011, *An ageing workforce*, show that a third of the workforce will be aged 50 plus by 2020, with the number aged over 65 already well in excess of one million.

Ageing workforce

This shift in workforce demographics brings significant health challenges, says Rachel Suff, public policy adviser at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). "Older employees tend to have less short-term absence but they are more likely to have developed chronic conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure," she says. "Employers should factor this into workplace health and wellbeing programmes."

As well as providing more health information to help employees reduce the risk of developing these types of conditions, more health-screening initiatives are worth considering. These can help employees detect problems and make lifestyle changes to prevent them developing altogether.

While some of the focus will be on keeping employees fit and well, employers will also need to consider how they deal with chronic conditions in the workplace. Liz Egan, lead for the Working through



Cancer programme run by Macmillan Cancer Support, says: "Employers need to prepare for a huge increase in the number of people working with chronic conditions. As an example, today, around 750,000 people of a working age are living with cancer, but by 2030 this number is expected to increase to 1.7 million."

To help employers in this arena, Macmillan Cancer Support has developed its Macmillan at Work programme. This particular initiative provides employers with the information they need, through newsletters, toolkits and e-learning, to enable them to support employees with cancer in the workplace.

While more and more employers are looking at ways they can be better prepared for this shift in workforce demographics, there has also been a broader move towards looking at prevention rather than cure across workplace health and wellbeing programmes.

This approach was highlighted in the Health and Safety Executive's Helping Great Britain work well strategy, which was published earlier this year. Edward Braisher, health and safety information manager at the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH), says: "Earlier prevention is a key factor when it comes to improving health and safety in the workplace, especially because it is more cost-effective than trying to intervene when a person is suffering from more serious ill-health."

There is also plenty that employers can do to prevent employees developing health problems. Dr Steven Nimmo, a consultant in occupational medicine and a member of the Society of Occupational Medicine, says: "Workplace health promotions can work well but even simple things such as introducing walking clubs and healthy food in the canteen can make a big difference to employees' health."

Technology is proving to be a good way to deliver some of these initiatives. With most of us now carrying smartphones, apps and wearable technology are becoming increasingly popular in workplace programmes, says Louise Aston, wellbeing director at Business in the Community. "These can be used to track everything from diet and activity through to sleeping

"IT CAN BE REALLY POWERFUL IF SOMEONE AT WORK TALKS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS"

Rachel Suff,
CIPD

patterns," she explains. "But what makes them particularly popular is that as well as being able to personalise goals, they also encourage healthy competition. This makes them fun and engaging."

Mental health awareness

The move from cure to prevention is also happening for mental health. This remains a major issue for employers, with charity Mind estimating that mental health affects one in six British workers a year, but there are signs that employers are taking it more seriously.

Although line-manager training remains key to helping identify potential problems early, some employers are moving the agenda forward by making mental health more high profile, says the CIPD's Suff. "It can be really powerful if someone at work talks about their mental health problems," she explains. "This openness and understanding can help to get rid of the stigmas around it."

A good example of this is Barclays' 'This is Me' campaign. In this, employees talk openly and frankly about their mental health conditions alongside other aspects of their lives such as having children or being a football fan. This helps colleagues gain a better understanding of different mental health conditions, while also drawing attention to the support that is available through the organisation.

A growing number of employers are also looking to help employees become more resilient. As well as the growth of programmes such as mindfulness training in the workplace, employee assistance programmes (EAPs) can provide this preventative support. Andrew Kinder, chair of the UK Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA), says: "Where an organisation is going through change, [it] can work with an EAP to identify potential issues. This insight can help to minimise the stress that employees will experience."

Technology is also being used more to support employees' mental health. For example, EAPs are beginning to introduce apps. "These can provide more interaction, guiding employees to the right advice and information but also helping with coaching," says Kinder. "The technology will also monitor how it's used so it can potentially understand more about the employee and the problems they have."

Work-life balance

As well as seeking to make people healthier, both physically and mentally, workplace health and wellbeing programmes are also seeking to make them happier. "Employees want a good work-life balance and we're seeing more employers putting measures in place to accommodate this," says Aston. "We've seen some offer employees



Statistics

42%

of over 50s had at least one chronic condition in 2014

(Source: The Work Foundation, January 2015)

£26bn

is the annual cost to the UK economy of work-related mental ill-health (Source: Mind, 2011)

1.7m

people of working age will be living with cancer by 2030

(Source: Macmillan Cancer Support)



Statistics

1.1m

people aged 65 plus were in the UK workforce in May-July 2014

(Source: Department for Work and Pensions, October 2014)

40%

of the UK workforce will have at least one chronic and work-limiting health condition by 2030

(Source: The Work Foundation, January 2015)

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Get back in control

Steps to take when supporting employees with musculoskeletal problems



Michelle Rae | Head of product
Cigna

Problems such as back, neck and muscle pain are the most common cause of workplace absence, according to the *Sickness absence in the workplace* report, published by the Office for National Statistics in February 2014. Musculoskeletal issues also account for the largest amount of healthcare spend across different industry sectors. So it makes good business sense to have the strategy in place to help support employees with this health risk.

Having the right healthcare plan in place is an essential component for businesses that wish to support musculoskeletal problems with a holistic approach. Healthcare providers are now able to offer much more than a comprehensive level of cover at the point of claiming. Innovations

**“BACK, NECK
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ABSENCE”**

in services, tools and how people access treatment all help to support musculoskeletal sufferers at every stage of their journey. These stages include:

Prevention

Musculoskeletal problems can be caused by a number of factors including manual handling, uncomfortable working positions and working too long without breaks. While not all back pain can be prevented, tackling a number of health risk factors can help alleviate musculoskeletal conditions. In particular, regular physical activity is of great benefit.

Healthcare plans often provide cost-effective tools which can encourage employees to make appropriate lifestyle choices. For example, through health and wellbeing portals and apps, employees can gain access to advice from a wide range of personalised health content. Employers may also want to invest in health promotion activities, such as educational on-site events, health MOTs and nutrition clinics.

Healthcare providers work in close partnership with industry experts and can save employers time by looking for the right provider to address their specific workplace health challenges. There may even be discounted rates available to help save money too.

Identification and treatment

The longer an employee is off work with back pain, the less likely it is they will return

to work. Therefore, it is important that employees access appropriate care, such as physiotherapy, quickly.

Some healthcare providers can help with this, for example, by offering self-referral for services such as physiotherapy or by directing employees to a preferred provider or provider network. This enables plan members to arrange an appointment at a time and place convenient to them. This approach can significantly reduce the average waiting time for treatment to start when compared with access to a high street physiotherapist by GP referral. Further analysis based on outpatient physiotherapy paid claims under Cigna plans in 2014 showed that plan members typically complete their treatment plan with around two fewer sessions and at a lower cost per session. Subsequent data analysing return on investment showed that this can provide employers with an overall saving of 41% on physiotherapy treatment.

Supporting recovery

Musculoskeletal conditions can affect people in ways that may go far beyond the obvious aches and pains. It is not uncommon for musculoskeletal sufferers to develop mood disorders and mental health problems. Employers should, therefore, look to treat the whole person, rather than just their symptoms. This could include signposting members to online self-help techniques or seeking referral to cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) sessions.

For individuals who need surgery, meanwhile, enhanced rehabilitation services can provide a personal recovery programme and health check, along with elements such as exercise and diet advice.

Ongoing management

It is helpful to monitor trends and healthcare plan dashboards are a useful tool to identify musculoskeletal claim hot spots. Providers can work closely with employers to help deliver these insights and identify the right solutions to drive business health priorities. It is also important for employers to communicate the value of the healthcare package to their workforce and create awareness of the benefits and support available.

With the right healthcare provider on board, employers can take a huge step forward in creating a positive environment where all employees can thrive. Taking a holistic approach puts employers back in control of their best business asset: their people ■



Making no bones about safety

Royal Mail is working hard to ensure its staff members do not develop musculoskeletal disorders



Dr Shaun Davis | Group director of safety, health, wellbeing and sustainability, Royal Mail

As we know, all employers have a duty of care to protect their employees from developing musculoskeletal disorders due to their work. Royal Mail takes this responsibility very seriously and places the safety, health and wellbeing of its people as the highest priority.

Collecting, sorting, distributing and delivering letters and parcels across the UK, by its nature, involves a lot of physical work. We deliver to 29 million addresses, six days each week and this is what makes us such a trusted and respected brand, something we are all very proud of. One important aspect we have to consider as we undertake our operations is the fact we have an ageing workforce: 75% of our staff are over 40 years old and a high proportion of individuals have worked for Royal Mail for most, or all, of their working life.

For many years, Royal Mail has had an ergonomics team that has been involved in the development of new equipment and working methods from the requirements analysis, right through to deployment. This allows refinement of the designs to meet the needs of users at any stage during the design and selection process, and often results in relatively small changes being made early on that have a major impact on usability.

User trials form part of the evaluation process and give a valuable insight into potential problem areas and solutions before designs are finalised. This saves problems being identified later on that may then be costly to rectify and result in musculoskeletal or other usability issues that are difficult to manage. Early engagement is key to success.

Manual handling is a common cause of musculoskeletal problems and the very

nature of our work involves lifting, moving and carrying, so manual handling and its management is an area we keep a very close eye on, looking for new ways of working. Regulation places a requirement on employers to avoid manual handling activities where practical to do so, and to assess the risk of those that cannot be avoided. Since regulations came into force, manual handling risk assessment in Royal Mail has led to many improvements in the activities carried out and, through our continuous improvement programme, World Class Mail, we have identified new, innovative and safer ways to operate.

A study of ill-health data in 2004 showed that sickness absence due to musculoskeletal disorders was highest in delivery postmen and women who carried a delivery pouch on their shoulder. Largely as a result of this study, a complete review of the way we deliver mail was carried out. Now, most delivery staff work in pairs from a small van allowing much lighter weights to be carried and trolleys are available to move the mail for all suitable routes. This has led to a reduction in musculoskeletal disorders reported by our people.

We have an active wellbeing programme in Royal Mail: Feeling First Class. This programme encourages individuals to look after themselves and signposts them to support services such as our employee assistance programme. We also provide gyms at our larger sites and promote the benefits that regular exercise can have.

Where problems do occur we have the support of a professional occupational health service to provide advice and support on musculoskeletal disorders, supporting our employees until they are fit and well, and able to return to work 

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Heart-in-mouth approach

How to put oral health at the heart of employee wellbeing



Colin Perry | Corporate channel manager
Denplan

Some 82% of employers that provide a dental plan for staff believe that this enhances employee wellbeing, according to the *Corporate decision maker's survey*, published by Denplan in April 2016. The survey also showed that the number of organisations offering dental insurance as an employee benefit has been steadily increasing since 2010 and dental plans being offered as an employee benefit have increased to 40% in 2016.

So with myriad options available for employers when it comes to formulating a health and wellbeing strategy, how can giving staff access to dental healthcare help boost their general wellbeing?

First, providing employees with a regular oral health assessment through their dental benefits should help staff keep their teeth healthy and clean to maintain good oral

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health. At a check-up, a dentist will usually assess a patient's current oral health, any risk of future disease, and advise them on the care and treatment required to secure good oral health. With 77% of UK adults visiting the dentist on a regular basis, according to a *YouGov Health and wellbeing survey*, undertaken in January 2016, it should be a benefit that will be well used by employees. Furthermore, 90% of UK adults agree that the better they look after their teeth and gums, the better chance they have of avoiding costly and invasive dental treatment in the future.

The wider health risks

A dentist may also ask about a patient's general health and any specific problems they have had with their teeth, mouth or gums since the last visit. There has been a great deal of research published about the impact poor oral health can have on a person's overall health and a dentist will be looking out for signs of serious diseases and illnesses that can be detected in the mouth.

Research by scientists at the University of Birmingham, published in the *Journal of Clinical Periodontology* in February 2016, which analysed data from more than 13,000 participants in the US-based *Third national health and nutrition examination study*, revealed that patients with chronic kidney disease and severe gum disease have a higher mortality rate than those with chronic kidney disease alone. Gum disease is an infection of the tissues that support

the teeth, caused mainly by bacteria which results from plaque build-up. If the plaque is not effectively removed by brushing and flossing, the bacteria can irritate the gums causing swelling, bleeding and soreness.

In some patients who are susceptible to gum disease, the body overreacts to the bacteria around the gums and causes too much inflammation. If this does not clear up properly it can lead to inflammation throughout the body, which can be an underlying issue in diseases, including heart disease, and rheumatoid arthritis.

Dentists can diagnose gum disease and help advise people on measures to treat the condition and prevent it from re-occurring. While routine dental checks cannot diagnose systemic disease, these can help patients to be aware of their risk of developing inflammation in the body so that, if necessary, they can seek medical guidance and take preventative action.

In this way, dental benefits can contribute towards a preventative approach by encouraging employees to look after their oral health, forming part of a longer-term strategy to positively influence their overall general health. Three-quarters of organisations have a health and wellbeing strategy, with a bias towards a planned preventative approach, according to the aforementioned *Corporate decision maker's survey*. So, in light of such research and information, it is a good idea to highlight the wider health benefits of a regular oral health check when communicating the dental benefits available to a workforce.

Implementing change

Communication plays an essential role in the promotion of oral healthcare, and it would be worthwhile for employers to concentrate some of their efforts in communicating to staff the value of dentistry as a wider healthcare benefit. A dental plan provider should also be able to help with this.

By moving away from the perception that dentistry is focused solely on the mouth and educating staff about the wider benefits of being dentally fit, a dental plan can become an important part of an overall health and wellbeing strategy.

It is interesting to note that 64% of employees that do not receive a dental plan would consider one if their employer offered it and 60% of employees without a dental plan believe dental is a tangible, usable benefit, according to the *YouGov Health and wellbeing survey* ■





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Get your teeth into health

Oral diseases, such as tooth decay, can have an effect on people's general wellbeing



Dr Sally Weston-Price | Academic clinical fellow
Queen Mary University of London

Sadly, oral diseases are still commonplace in the UK with the *Adult dental health survey 2009*, from the Health and Social Care Information Centre showing almost a third of adults have obvious tooth decay and nearly half have signs of gum disease. It is important to remember that the mouth is attached to the body and oral diseases, such as tooth decay, can affect people's general wellbeing.

It is well known that tooth decay can lead to pain and discomfort, which may reduce an individual's ability to perform tasks either directly or as a result of sleepless nights. Yet there are lesser-publicised impacts of oral disease that can include psychological and social effects.

Dental conditions have been shown to reduce self-esteem and affect social interactions. The visible loss of teeth may

“DENTAL
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SELF-
ESTEEM”

lead people to experience acute social embarrassment and research has suggested that missing teeth may induce a negative social perception from others. Therefore, an unhealthy smile could have an effect on job prospects.

The good news is that many oral diseases are preventable by following steps that can be incorporated into a daily routine. The UK advice for adults to reduce their risk of dental decay and gum disease is to: brush teeth twice daily with fluoridated toothpaste last thing at night and at least on one other occasion; spit out after brushing and not to rinse, leaving a coating of fluoride on the teeth; reduce the frequency and amount of sugary food and drinks in the diet; avoid tobacco products; and visit for a check-up at an interval agreed with a dentist.

Evidence shows that altering behaviour is a hard task. After all, how many times have we started a new diet or joined a new gym? To increase the uptake and maintenance of behaviours a routine can prove very effective and since we spend on average eight hours a day in the workplace, this is a crucial setting we can develop to support a healthy lifestyle.

There can be implications for an employee's work productivity due to poor oral health from lack of sleep to days off work due to pain or lengthy courses of dental treatment. Therefore, workplaces could be developed by employers to help individuals adopt healthy practices by creating supportive environments to promote oral health.

The best drink for our teeth is plain, unflavoured water but often in work surroundings there are vending machines full of soft drinks. These drinks may be seen as falsely providing energy or even chosen due to lack of an alternative. However, soft drinks, both diet and regular versions, can prove harmful to teeth, with the sugar and acid they contain leading to erosion of the tooth surface and tooth decay.

Therefore, offering freely available drinking water by installing and maintaining drinking fountains, employees are aided in making healthy choices more freely and hopefully next time avoiding the temptation of the vending machine.

Similarly, to help employees choose and consume low-sugar meals and snacks, it would be supportive to have these products available in the workplace. Stocking canteens and vending machines with healthy alternatives to sugar-dense chocolate bars and cakes would provide an in-house solution.

If we wish to encourage good oral hygiene at work, the means to conduct this needs to be on site. Providing clean suitable spaces for tooth brushing would make the prospect far more appealing, which could be a necessity for working patterns not conducive to brushing at home.

If people improve their oral health, routine dental appointments need not be frequent, because people with low risks of oral disease need to visit a dentist only once every two years. So investing in good oral habits in the workplace can be cost-efficient by reducing sickness absence and time off for dental visits.

Oral health is essential for general health and wellbeing. There are potential links between oral disease and systematic diseases, and these share common risks with many chronic diseases.

Supporting a healthy diet, good hygiene and responsible use of alcohol not only supports a healthy workplace in respect of the teeth and mouth but the whole body. In summary, creating healthy workplaces creates a healthy workforce 



Working towards a flexible future

Health cash plan providers are now offering more choice than ever to meet different needs



Philip Wood | Executive director of sales and marketing
Health Shield

Health cash plans are a simple and affordable way for employers to look after the health and wellbeing of their employees. They can help organisations of all shapes and sizes to reduce absenteeism, improve their duty of care, and increase the morale and productivity of their workforce.

With UK organisations now keen to proactively look after the health and wellbeing of their employees, health cash plans are ideally placed to deliver an option to achieve this. Their popularity with employers continues to rise, with figures from LaingBuisson showing that the number of employer-paid cash plans increased by three-and-a-half times between 2007-2014.

Rather than standing still, the industry is always evolving to provide greater choice,

“THERE ARE
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AND SHAPES
AND SIZES”

personalisation and a growing range of health benefits and preventative services.

Bespoke health cash plans

The biggest change in recent years has been the increasing number of organisations looking for more flexible and bespoke programmes. This seems to be linked to pensions auto-enrolment, which has led to many reviewing their wider health benefits. Some want plans with optional upgrades that can easily slot into their flexible benefits platforms or voluntary benefits schemes. Others want to mix and match health benefits to create their own bespoke plan to meet their budget, priorities and the needs of their workforce.

Quick and simple one-size-fits-all schemes are no longer the default choice. More organisations want to spend time looking at the different options to create one-off plans with tailored benefits, pricing and terms and conditions.

Employers want their employees to make the most of their health cash plan. So, providers now also offer greater flexibility in how these are used. Processes are being simplified and claims are getting quicker. Health cash plan providers are staying abreast of technological developments to ensure they can always offer the highest level of customer service and claims management both online and offline.

The needs of employees have never been more varied, and health cash plan

suppliers continually respond by offering additional benefit options which are flexible and can be easily accessed across all kinds of communications channels.

It is not just employees who want processes to be simpler and more flexible. Rather than having to manage lots of different offerings, employers want their health cash plans to sit seamlessly among their existing benefits platform. This is where a bespoke or modular scheme can really come into its own.

A flexible future

It is not easy to anticipate what health cash plans will be like in 2020. But it is expected they will continue to evolve to offer greater flexibility, while effectively managing conduct risk. Future cash plan products could: offer greater speed and flexibility with new technologies leading to faster claims and truly paperless systems; become easier to use with more personalisation and digital communications speeding up support and processes; and enable organisations to tailor them, while offering an even greater choice of health benefits and preventative benefits.

As the UK economy continues to pick up, it's predicted that spending on healthcare will grow too. All the signs are that, by embracing new technologies, health cash plans can continue to be a useful resource for employers in the future, constantly evolving to fulfil the healthcare needs for all employees ■



Looking after our most valuable asset

Rightmove sets great store by its health cash plan to take care of its people



Zoe Casey | HR manager
Rightmove

The British property obsession has made Rightmove one of the UK's top 10 busiest websites, alongside brands such as Google and Amazon. We are proud to be the UK's number-one property website, and our achievements are not just the result of our teams working incredibly hard; they are also the result of employing passionate people.

People are an organisation's most valuable asset. Everyone who works at Rightmove is critical to our success and growth, because we depend on their skills and commitment. It is important that as an employer we look after our people, so the benefits we offer to employees are crucial.

We have had a cash plan in place, provided by Health Shield, for a year, to

complement our private medical insurance scheme. We chose a tailored plan that specifically caters for all our needs. One of the overarching benefits is that it enables staff to access medical treatment without needing to make an appointment with their GP, which makes life a lot easier for them.

A health cash plan is a cost-effective way for businesses to look after the health and wellbeing of employees. Staff can claim cashback on dental check-ups, eye tests, contact lenses and glasses, physiotherapy and specialist consultations. Other benefits include a 24/7 counselling and support helpline, and a virtual GP surgery, where employees can talk to a doctor any time of the day without taking time off from work.

"CASH PLANS MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO PEOPLE'S EVERYDAY LIFE AND CAN MEAN A BIG COST SAVING ON TREATMENT"

Our employees can choose the benefits they want to access and claim back the cost up to the set limits. It gives staff the freedom to choose who provides their day-to-day healthcare, and the benefits are also extended to their family members.

According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's (CIPD's) *Absence management survey 2014*, published in October 2014, the average cost of absence per employee stands at £609 a year. Preventative health benefits, such as cash plans, can save businesses money in the long term, helping to improve staff wellbeing, motivation and morale.

My experience is that a cash plan is a great benefit to offer. It is something that makes a difference to people's everyday life, and if all the benefits are used it can mean a big cost saving for employees against the normal cost of various health treatments. We have had very positive feedback from our staff since implementing the plan.

I would recommend businesses consider a cash plan when looking at benefits to offer staff. My tip would be to check the background of the provider and ensure there are no caveats around the claims that can be made.

It is important to know what our employees think about what it is like to work at Rightmove, so we run an annual 'Have your say' survey. An overwhelming 91% of respondents said Rightmove is a great place to work, which is testament to our culture. People also want to stay long term. In 2015, we celebrated 38 people being at Rightmove for 10 years or more. There are now over 400 employees, with the first ever Rightmove employee still working here today 



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Tackling the workplace's last taboo

Employers need to understand the causes and prevalence of mental health among their workforce



Meesha Birch | Employer and intermediary marketing manager
Simplyhealth

Sleepless nights, feelings of panic, anxiety and a lack of concentration will never be conducive to an engaged and productive workforce. None of us should have to live with the symptoms of too much mental or emotional pressure on a daily basis, but the reality is that a huge number of employees already are.

According to the Mental Health Taskforce to the NHS in England's *Five Year Forward View for Mental Health*, published in February 2016, a staggering one in four adults in the UK will experience a diagnosable mental illness every year. This could include stress, anxiety, depression or bi-polar disorder, and will affect all aspects of their lives, not just their jobs. What is more, many of these people are afraid to

**"ONE IN FOUR
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speak up about their problems for fear of being stigmatised and marginalised, particularly in the workplace.

For too long, talking about mental health issues has been a taboo subject. Indeed, a survey of 1,251 British workers published by mental health charity Mind in 2014 revealed that nearly a third of British workers say they are not able to talk openly with their line manager if they are stressed and just 45% of those with a diagnosed mental health problem have told their current employer.

Even with the high-profile campaigns around the importance of mental wellbeing, people are still reluctant to open up about their personal mental health, particularly to their employers.

If poor mental health goes undetected and undiagnosed, the immediate knock-on effect is absence from work. According to the Office for National Statistics' *Sickness in the labour market* report, published in 2014, mental health problems such as stress, depression and anxiety accounted for 15.2 million sick days in 2013.

And this paints just a small part of the full picture. Due to the stigma attached to mental ill-health, 95% of British employees who took time off work due to stress told their boss there was another reason for their absence, according to the aforementioned Mind research.

So, if the majority of employees are currently conditioned to suffer in silence, what can be done? Well, a dive into the

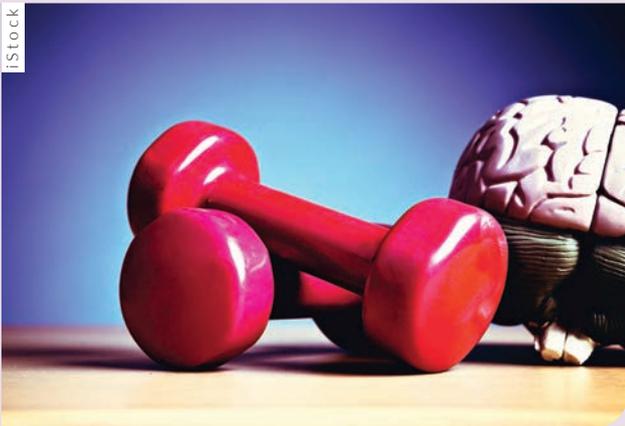
data could raise red flags of poor mental wellbeing among the workforce. Absence statistics, high levels of staff turnover, and increases in complaints and grievances can all point towards low levels of engagement and productivity.

Understanding the prevalence of mental ill-health also should include an assessment of the current workforce through staff surveys, identifying anyone at risk of mental ill-health or reflecting on any business decisions which could lead to a detrimental effect on mental health.

While there are no hard and fast rules, there are many subsequent steps employers can take, and a better understanding of the mental health issues within their organisation will provide guidance for the workplace adjustments that could be made to improve the situation.

Flexible working, alterations to return-to-work policies or the introduction of quiet rooms are all solutions within an HR professional's toolkit to help respond to this worrying trend that UK employers must do more to combat. Other options include introducing mediation, buddy systems, workload management or extra coaching and training but, fundamentally, any HR policy to tackle mental-ill health must be holistic, flexible and appropriate.

However, the 'human factor' cannot be underestimated and employees must be seen and treated as individuals, rather than automatons that leave their personalities at the office door each morning ■



Wellbeing is the best brain food

Creating mentally healthy workplaces involves promoting wellbeing for all staff



Emma Mamo | Head of workplace wellbeing
Mind

Creating mentally healthy workplaces

has never been more important. Our latest YouGov poll in 2014 revealed over half of workers (56%) found their work very or fairly stressful. Given this high prevalence of workplace stress, mental health at work is an issue too big to ignore.

Putting in place initiatives to promote staff wellbeing shows employees that an organisation is a responsible employer that values their contribution and wellbeing. It also makes good business sense. Employers that look after their staff reap rewards in terms of increased staff morale, productivity and retention, as well as reduced sickness absence. Three-in-five people polled told us that if their employer took action to support staff mental wellbeing, they would feel more loyal, motivated and committed, and would be more likely to recommend their workplace as a good place to work.

Mind the gaps: the 2015 Deloitte millennial survey, suggests that the things that employees value have changed. They found that millennials (those born in the 1980s and 1990s) who have been entering the job market throughout the early 21st century place greater emphasis on a healthy work-life balance and a positive workplace culture, and are more likely to turn their back on their employer if these needs are not met. Workplace wellbeing initiatives such as employee assistance programmes and flexible-working hours are now common currency, so if an organisation is not offering these, there is a chance it could lose good personnel to another employer that does.

Before implementing any measures to boost staff wellbeing, it is advisable to conduct an anonymous staff survey to gain insight into the wellbeing and satisfaction

“GIVEN HIGH LEVELS OF STRESS, MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK IS AN ISSUE THAT IS TOO BIG TO IGNORE”

of individual members of staff. If carried out regularly, be it annually or more frequently if necessary, surveys are hugely valuable in highlighting areas where an organisation is doing well and areas that need improvement. They can also show where existing policies and practice are not consistently applied.

Creating mentally healthy workplaces involves promoting wellbeing for all staff, tackling work-related mental health problems and supporting staff experiencing mental health problems. There are a number of practical ways employers can improve working conditions, which need not be costly. Small, inexpensive measures can make a huge difference. Wellness action plans are jointly drawn up by

managers and staff, and identify what helps people stay well at work, as well as specific symptoms, triggers and support needs and agreed solutions.

These person-centred, tailored plans can be very effective because they recognise the fluctuating nature of mental health problems and the way in which mental health affects everyone differently. Even more importantly, they can facilitate constructive and supportive conversations about managing mental ill-health. As well as putting in place initiatives, it is also really important staff know about them and are able to access them. In order to have an impact, they need to be easy to access and well publicised.

Employers should ensure every member of staff has clearly outlined roles and responsibilities, and that their workload is manageable and targets achievable. Regular communication between managers and line reports is important, particularly for staff working remotely and/or in isolation. Having frequent meetings creates the space for employees to discuss any issues they are facing and develop methods to tackle these problems. Supportive employers promote staff wellbeing and retention. The physical workspace is also hugely important, as lighting, temperature and greenery all play a role in how we feel.

Thankfully, employers are becoming more conscious of workplace wellbeing. This is in part due to the positive impact of anti-stigma campaigns such as Time to Change, run by Mind and Rethink Mental Illness. In recognition of some of the positive steps being made in this arena, Mind will soon be launching a Workplace Wellbeing Index, enabling employers to celebrate the good work they are doing to promote staff mental wellbeing and get the support to be able to do this even better 



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Time for some blue-light thinking

What impact is exposure to blue light from digital devices actually having on employees?



Jeremy Chadwick | Managing director, Europe, the Middle East and Africa
VSP Vision Care

According to research by eMarketer, published in September 2015, UK adults are averaging more than eight hours per day on digital devices. We are continuing to hear more about the increase in reports of eye strain and visual fatigue related to digital devices. It is part of a wave of concern about the impact of blue light on vision, which is starting to become more widely recognised in the UK.

The Vision of Britain report published by Optegra Eye Hospital Yorkshire in 2015 found nearly half (45%) of optometrists and opticians say they have seen an increase in technology-related eye problems in the past five years.

In addition, in the US, the *VSP Vision care research*, published in 2016 shows that teenagers have spent one-third of their entire life looking at digital devices. This

“EYES ARE
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is a phenomenon that is not just limited to teens; it also has a great effect on the workforce.

Blue light is a high-energy light emitted from computer screens, televisions, tablets, smartphones, and even some light-emitting diodes (LEDs) and compact fluorescent lights (CFLs), which is why electronics tend to glow with a blue-ish hue in a dark room. Blue light causes eye strain and visual fatigue because it passes through the lens of the eye and defocuses in front of the retina, an effect we perceive as a glare.

Eyes working overtime

Eyes are constantly working overtime to focus and process blue light, which creates eye strain. Blue light has been shown to disrupt the natural production of melatonin, a hormone produced in the evening that tells our bodies when it is time to sleep. Researchers also continue to investigate the potential long-term, cumulative effects of blue light exposure, including possible vision loss.

Many people in the UK spend the majority of their time in front of a screen when they are at work, which makes blue light a concern for employers, as well. Regular eye tests can help with these issues and steps can be taken to counteract it, such as eyewear with lenses that help to reduce blue light exposure.

In addition to the potential productivity issues related to blue light, employers also must meet the legislative guidelines related

to eye safety and computer use. Employers are required to protect their staff against harmful eye exposure. This requirement can be met by providing employees with coverage for eye tests and, when needed, computer glasses. As we continue to learn more about blue light, the benefits associated with comprehensive eye care continue to increase. In fact, in 2004, the UAB School of Optometry found that employees with healthy eyes and proper vision correction are 20% more productive than those who do not have healthy eyes and proper vision.

The good thing for employers is that a comprehensive vision benefit provides multiple layers of benefits in support of their overall health and productivity initiatives. In addition to meeting the VDU requirement, a vision benefit will also help ensure employees see well, address symptoms related to digital eye strain, and check eye health. All these things will help a workforce stay productive and healthy.

As we learn more about impacts related to blue light, it is important not to lose sight of the simple solution. VSP's research in the UK, the *VSP Vision care research* has found that 39% of UK adults are not getting regular eye tests. That becomes even more critical the more we are exposed to blue light emitted from the devices we depend on every day. A specialised eye care benefit that promotes engagement in eye health and utilisation of the benefit is valuable to employees and employers ■





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Six key steps to get a clear view of eye regulations

Employers have an obligation to care for the eye health of employees who work with display screen equipment



David Cartwright | Chairman
Eyecare Trust

Research conducted by the Eyecare Trust, the *Square eyed Britain* report, shows that, on average, office workers each spend 3,000 hours a year staring at screens. So it is no surprise that 90% say they regularly suffer 'screen fatigue', which includes headaches, sore or tired eyes, impaired colour perception and blurred vision.

To combat the visual stress associated with prolonged screen use, the Health and Safety Executive places a legal obligation on all employers to care for the eye health of staff who regularly use display screen equipment (DSE) at work.

To comply with these regulations, there are six key steps employers should take:

Identify which employees are covered by the regulations

All employees who continuously use DSE for an hour or more on most workdays are

covered. Some of the regulations also extend to temporary staff and self-employed contractors.

Conduct workstation assessments

Anyone can undertake a workstation assessment. However, they should be suitably trained to recognise poor and inefficient workstation layouts, environments and practices. It is advisable to conduct an assessment when a user begins work at the workstation and after any material change to the station or its immediate environment.

Act on any issues highlighted by the assessment

An assessment might highlight issues with the ergonomic design of the workspace, the environment or the working practice of the individual. Common issues that require attention include: poor office lighting: are

there blinds on windows to prevent harsh glare and reflections? Awkward desk arrangements: does the office furniture allow for a comfortable seated position where the user's eyes are level with the top of the computer screen and the screen is an arm's length away? Dry office environments: are humidity levels satisfactory? Plants can help to prevent dryness created by electronic devices.

Give employees regular sight tests

DSE users should have their sight tested when they begin work with an organisation and then at regular intervals; every two years is recommended.

Users may also request a sight test paid for by their employer at any time if they are having visual difficulties.

Make a contribution towards the cost of any vision correction required solely for DSE work

Employers can subscribe to corporate eyecare schemes to help cover the cost of providing regular sight tests and eyewear for use with DSE. A number of providers offer a wide range of packages for both large and small employers.

Provide health and safety training on the risks associated with intensive screen work

Employees should be reminded regularly about good working practices and the importance of good eye health in the workplace. Basic guidance should include the 20-20-20 rule: look away from your screen every 20 minutes, for 20 seconds and focus on objects 20 feet away.

It is relatively straightforward to comply with this legislation, yet a study conducted by the Eyecare Trust in 2010 found many employers fail to meet their obligations.

The worst offenders were found to be small businesses, where one in five (21%) made no eyecare provision, only a third (33%) offered to pay for sight tests, and just a quarter (25%) said they ensure workstations are designed to minimise glare or reflection. These are two factors that can cause screen fatigue and visual trauma.

Almost one in five (18%) big businesses also failed to pay for regular sight tests, even though the penalties for non-compliance with the legislation include improvement notices, prohibition orders, fines and even criminal prosecution.

The benefits of employers investing in an eye-friendly culture are far-reaching because good vision can improve productivity, increase job satisfaction and reduce days lost to eye-related sickness. In fact, we estimate work-related eyestrain and vision problems cost UK industry about £1.5 billion a year through absenteeism and reduced productivity 

"BENEFITS OF EMPLOYERS INVESTING IN AN EYE-FRIENDLY CULTURE ARE FAR-REACHING"

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We are sitting ourselves to death

Not taking a break can have drastic consequences for employees' health



Fiona Lowe | Head of people strategy and development
Westfield Health

It has been almost 10 years since smoking was banned in public places in the UK and it seems a lifetime ago that little groups would regularly disappear from the office for breaks throughout the day for their nicotine fix in the cold.

Although the health implications of smoking are well-documented, the drastic and deadly effects on our health and wellbeing of not taking a break at all, are not so well publicised. *The Westfield Health walking lunch* survey published by Westfield Health in May 2016 of 2,000 British employees, found concerning results at best.

“ALMOST 60%
OF BRITISH
WORKERS
SPEND MOST
OF THEIR
WORKING
DAY SITTING
DOWN”

Worryingly, almost 60% of British workers spend most of their working day sitting down and over half (51%) do not get up from their desk at all, apart from toilet breaks. In addition, 55% walk for less than 20 minutes in total on an average day with the worst culprits being those who work in financial services, where 76% admit to only getting up from their desk for less than one hour a day.

Sitting is the new smoking

There is a great deal of evidence that prolonged sitting increases the risk of obesity but also causes several serious illnesses like cancer, heart disease and type 2 diabetes. It seems it really could be true: sitting is the new smoking.

Whether an employee's place of work is in a car, at a shop till or in a more traditional office, one common theme is that it involves sitting down for too long each day and studies show that our sedentary culture is taking a major toll on employee health.

And it seems that the humble lunch break, often the only real break in the day many of us get, is itself becoming extinct. According to the aforementioned research, 62% of employees are too busy to take a lunch break, 55% go 'al desko', not moving a muscle and eating lunch at their desk and 16% do not eat lunch at all.

The World Health Organisation has identified physical inactivity as the fourth biggest killer on the planet, ahead of obesity. And this is nothing new; a study of

bus drivers and conductors carried out by Transport for London in the 1950s, the *London transport workers study: Coronary heart disease and physical activity of work*, provides stark evidence of the dangers of spending too much time sitting down. It found that drivers, who spend more of their time sitting, were one-and-a-half times as likely to develop heart disease as conductors, who stood more often.

Having 'walking meetings' and standing at a desk are both ways to help alleviate the health implications of a sedentary workplace lifestyle. Winston Churchill was a fan of standing while working at his desk, and even Victoria Beckham has posted a picture on Instagram of her working at a treadmill desk in incredibly high heels.

Dr James Levine, director of the Mayo Clinic-Arizona State University Obesity Solutions Initiative and inventor of the treadmill desk, has studied the adverse effects of increasingly sedentary lifestyles for years. He has summed up his findings in two sentences: "Sitting kills more people than HIV and is more treacherous than parachuting. We are sitting ourselves to death."

As well as the physical benefits, there are also less tangible rewards. Many people notice their mood improves and enjoy a general sense of wellbeing. Our research revealed that 40% of employees feel less stressed, more motivated and have a clearer head after having a walk and getting some fresh air for at least part of the day ■



Making a head start

A comprehensive approach to health means addressing issues relating to psychological wellbeing



Dr David Batman | Chief medical officer
Global Corporate Challenge

In the complex modern business environment, people managers need to promote a comprehensive approach to health and wellbeing. In particular, they face challenges as they address issues related to psychological health, such as anxiety and stress.

Times have changed for people managers. Previously, the emphasis was on managing physical risks and their impact on employees, in relation to manual handling, noise and repetitive strain injuries. Business emphasis was on managing absence, treatments and return to safe working.

21st-century challenges

Recent trends have seen a move to a more office-based, customer service, IT-driven workforce with new challenges and demands impacting significantly on psychological health, stress, depression and anxiety. Changes in the global economy are creating a workforce that will be required to work longer, both in terms of hours and lifespan, in a world of insecurity and uncertainty. Technology has driven a move to a 24-hour 'employee workplace' with constant connectivity. This has major consequences for work-life balance. Businesses need to become increasingly proactive, both in support of employee health and business resilience.

In this environment, the key lies in addressing multiple components of health and wellbeing; health is multifaceted, and to truly build a culture of health and wellbeing, an organisation needs to focus on its many components, including physical, psychological, career, financial, social, and community wellbeing in the workplace.

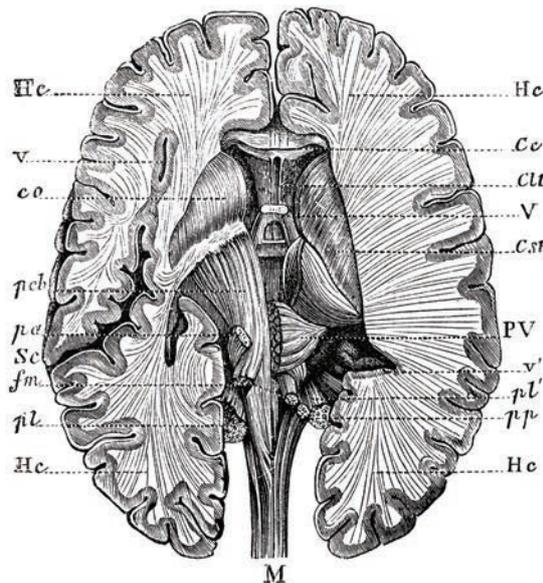
Some simple but effective ways to make a lasting impact, in a business of any size,

“RECENT TRENDS HAVE SEEN A MOVE TO A MORE IT-DRIVEN WORKFORCE WITH NEW DEMANDS AFFECTING HEALTH”

include: leading by example from the top so business leaders show a commitment to health; employers demonstrating they care about employee wellbeing with actions, not just in policy and words; making health choices simple choices available to all at low cost; making a financial commitment to wellbeing, so creating a budget; creating and supporting local champions; and making a long-term commitment as part of an HR planning strategy.

Psychological wellbeing

Psychological health affects 17% of the working population, and 30% of us will experience one or more episodes in our lives. These numbers demand action. But



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the rise in poor psychological wellbeing presents a problem for people managers because it is largely an invisible issue. If an employee has a back injury, employers can see their struggle and help. That is not the case with psychological wellbeing.

Successful outcomes require a responsive and understanding line manager, one who is equipped to spot and engage psychological health issues. If employers do start to observe tell-tale signs in employees, such as low morale and poor-quality work if they are present or frequent, frustrating absence if they are not, then they should apply a deft touch.

Responses from employers might include involving HR, and perhaps flexibility in working hours or requirements. Remember: it is counterproductive to confront or risk stigmatising employees.

Body and mind

The mind-body connection is undeniable. There is no physical illness that does not have a psychological component. We all worry when ill. Pain affects the brain, lack of sleep affects the body, for example. Half of our risk of ill-health is related to lifestyle, for example, exercise, nutrition, sleep, in addition to other factors, such as smoking and alcohol intake.

These risk factors are also major contributors to psychological illness, which have an impact on employee and business performance. By tackling the risk factors with a whole-of-person approach to health, employers can begin to inform and educate employees of risks to their job performance and personal lives.

It is vital to have a cohesive approach so that changes become a habit and not just a short-term challenge 



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