**SAFE WORK MONTH**

**The bulletin will seek to:**

* Raise an awareness of workers and PCBUs responsibilities with regard to general safety within the workplace.
* Invite workers to raise safety issues that they perceive as a concern.

**Application:** The application of the Safety Principles will apply to:

* All area where staff may be working including:
* Internal Sites
* External Sites.

**Principles:**

October is National Safe Work Month - a time to commit to building a safe and healthy workplace.

Being healthy and safe means being free from physical and psychological harm. No job should be unsafe and no death or injury is acceptable. A safe and healthy workplace benefits everyone.

The theme for National Safe Work Month this year is **think safe. work safe. be safe.**

This October **think safe. work safe. be safe.** at your workplace by planning and implementing work health and safety procedures

**Working together to protect workers mental health**

How common are mental health issues? Mental health is everyone’s business. It is estimated that, at any point in time, 1 in 6 working age people will be suffering from mental illness. A further one-sixth of the population will be suffering from symptoms associated with mental ill health, such as worry, sleep problems and fatigue, which, while not meeting criteria for a diagnosed mental illness, will be affecting their ability to function at work. Given the statistics, it is likely that you will come across mental illness in your workplace.

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**Myths and facts:** Myths about mental illness are common and can be extremely damaging. Reducing stigma through understanding the truth about mental illness leads to better outcomes for everyone.

**A chart of mental health

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**What is stress?**

Stress is often confused with anxiety, but it is not a diagnosable mental illness. It is a ‘normal’ condition, experienced by everyone, and involves an emotional, physical or mental response to events that cause bodily or mental tension. It can therefore be thought of as a state of ‘readiness’ – involving both physical and psychological responses and is associated with arousal – the “fight or flight” response. Within limits, stress has positive effects on motivation and performance, enabling us to meet deadlines, think and respond quickly. Too little stress can cause problems. For example, it might be hard to motivate yourself to complete a task if there is no deadline to work towards. Too little stress can also allow time for negative ruminations, feelings of not making progress or failure, reduce the amount of positive feedback (internal or external) and lower the sense of personal satisfaction. All of which can contribute to mental health issues. Too much stress though and performance deteriorates. When stress is sustained for too long a period, health can also deteriorate. Research studies have now shown a direct link between chronic exposure to stress, prolonged activation of the body’s normal physiological stress response and increased risk of depression and anxiety.

**What is depression?**

**1 in 6 people will experience depression at some stage of their lives.**

We all feel sad, moody or low from time to time, but some people experience these feelings intensely, for long periods of time and sometimes for no apparent reason. 1 in 6 people will experience depression during their lifetime. Depression influences not only how you feel but also how you think, behave and interact with other people. Common signs of depression include:

• lowered self-esteem or self-worth

• change in sleep patterns, insomnia or broken sleep

• changes in appetite or weight

• less ability to control emotions such as pessimism, anger, guilt, irritability and anxiety

• varying emotions throughout the day, for example, feeling worse in the morning and better as the day progresses

• reduced capacity to experience pleasure: you can’t enjoy what’s happening now, nor look forward to anything with pleasure

• reduced pain tolerance: you are less able to tolerate aches and pains and may have a host of new ailments • reduced or absent sex drive

• poor concentration and memory

• reduced motivation: it doesn’t seem worth the effort to do anything, things seem meaningless

• lowered energy levels If these signs persist for most of the day for most days over a two week period, and they interfere with your ability to manage at home and at work, then you might benefit from getting an assessment by a skilled professional.

**What is anxiety?**

Just as there are times when you might feel down, but are not clinically depressed, there are times when you will feel anxious, but do not have an anxiety disorder. It’s normal to feel anxious in high pressure situations such as a job interview, when you’re speaking in public, or when you’re experiencing change in your life or work environment and you’re uncertain what the future will hold. To a degree, this anxiety can help us, making us stay focussed and alert. Anxiety becomes a problem when you start to feel anxious most of the time and about even minor things, to the point where your worry is out of control and interfering with your day to day life. Anxiety disorders are a mix of:

• psychological symptoms: frequent or excessive worry, poor concentration, specific fears or phobias e.g. fear of dying or fear of losing control

• physical symptoms: fatigue, irritability, sleeping difficulties, general restlessness, muscle tension, upset stomach, sweating and difficulty breathing

• behavioural changes: including procrastination, avoidance, difficulty making decisions and social withdrawal

To be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, a combination of symptoms is present on most days for more than six months and interferes with your ability to function at work or at home. It is common to experience a low mood secondary to excessive worry and the two conditions - clinical depression and anxiety disorder can occur at the same time

**1 in 4 people will experience anxiety.**

Changes in behaviour If you notice any change in behaviour or performance in a colleague or team member always consider whether it is due to a mental health issue. The types of changes in behaviour could include some of the following:

• change in routines (stopping participation in sport, social activities)

• talking about unusual/disturbing thoughts

• reporting or demonstrating symptoms associated with high levels of anxiety and/or lowered mood • lowered concentration and performance

• reduced motivation

• increased absenteeism

• social withdrawal or isolation

• decreased personal care

• use of drugs (illegal and/or legal) or alcohol

• reduced activity and energy

• high levels of irritability or aggression If you see changes like these, and you feel you can talk to person because you know them well or you have some responsibility for them, don’t be afraid to ask if things are OK.

They might want to talk – or they might not – but just letting someone know that you’ve noticed and that you care can make an enormous difference.

Having the conversation If you notice a change in a colleague or team member’s behaviour or performance ask yourself if it might be due to an underlying personal or mental health issue, and if you think this is a possibility then why not have a conversation and ask how the person is going? Keep these handy pointers in mind:

• choose a time and a place that suits you both – somewhere private when you both have time to talk

• talk about the changes you’ve noticed and ask if they want to talk about anything

• encourage them to talk, but accept that they might not want to right now

• listen and show that you’re listening – don’t jump in with a solution

• find out if they’re ready to look for help and if you can help them do that

• check in after a few days and see how they’re going

Talking about mental health at work

There is no obligation to tell your employer about a mental health condition if it does not affect how well you do your job. You need to tell your employer when your mental health condition:

• affects how you carry out the inherent requirements of your job. In this context, the purpose of providing the information is to enable your employer to identify reasonable adjustments that might assist you to perform your role.

• affects your health and safety and/or the health and safety of colleagues.

• is affected or could be affected by the nature of your work. A failure to disclose a mental illness may disentitle an employee to workers compensation should they suffer any recurrence, aggravation or exacerbation of a preexisting mental illness.

**Staying at work:**

It may seem logical to think that time off work is the best solution for anyone with a mental health issue, but in fact this is not always the case. Most people with mild to moderate mental health issues can function at work, perhaps with some reasonable adjustment to their duties, and benefit from being there. The benefits include:

• remaining part of a larger whole (belonging is an important component of resilience)

• avoiding isolation at home

• maintaining some productivity and sense of achievement

• providing a healthy distraction

• maintaining a routine

• better monitoring of progress

• visible support from peers and management

• resolution of precipitating and exacerbating issues in the workplace, leading to less ‘mental scar tissue’ relating to the work situation

• avoiding the need for a return to work after a period of absence, during which fears about the likely reactions of others may have developed or misperceptions may have increased

• increasing commitment to the organisation in that its efforts to assist are clearly visible An employee should not stay at work when s/he is:

• at risk of self-harming or suicidal behaviour

• a danger to others. The organisation has a duty of care to all of its employees and should a person’s mental illness result in behaviour that poses a risk to others, s/he should not remain in the workplace until the episode is contained

• showing signs of psychosis (e.g. delusions of grandeur, paranoia, hearing voices etc)

• is suffering from very deep depression, often characterised by psychomotor slowing, which severely impacts upon concentration, motivation, productivity and capacity to control emotions

• very agitated and is unable to control emotions

• behaving in a way that is significantly affecting other employees and reasonable adjustment is impossible or does not improve the situation

**Keeping the team healthy:**

If you’re a team leader or a team member, there are things you can do to promote mental health and wellbeing. Research shows that the way our jobs are designed, our organisations are structured and function, and the support we receive in the teams where we work are important factors in developing a mentally healthy workplace. Here are some things you can do:

• if you’re a team leader, build an ongoing feedback loop. Take time to have regular, informal conversations with each member of your team. Regular feedback rather than the ‘Annual Review’ is more likely to help them feel valued. It also allows you more opportunity to get to know them as individuals, and makes it more likely that you will a) notice changes in behaviour and performance earlier on if they arise and b) feel more comfortable asking about their wellbeing and mental health.

• everyone benefits by being clear about their role. A key component of workplace stress is a lack of role clarity. Find regular opportunities to discuss tasks and what’s expected.

• encourage trusting and respectful communications. Always hold sensitive conversations in places that provide privacy and respect.

• make work meaningful. Having regular conversations about how individual roles contribute towards the overall direction of the organisation can help people feel more connected.

• set the standard. If you witness or hear behaviour or conversations that are inappropriate, intervene promptly.

• be aware of the behaviour you model and the messages you send – whether you are a team leader or a team member – both in what you physically do and how you communicate.

• acknowledge good work and practice in your team.

• offer support through organisational resources

**Five Ways to Wellbeing:**

Wellbeing is generally thought to be made up of two main components: feeling good and functioning well. Feeling good can include feelings of happiness, contentment, enjoyment, curiosity and engagement – all of which contribute to a positive experience of life. Functioning well can include experiencing positive relationships, having some control over one’s life and having a sense of purpose.

**The Five Ways to Wellbeing** are a set of evidence-based actions which promote people’s wellbeing. They were developed from research conducted by over 400 experts in psychology, psychiatry, neuroscience, education, and economics from across the world who reviewed current knowledge on mental health and well-being**. The Five Ways to Wellbeing are**: **Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning and Give.** These activities are simple things individuals can do in their everyday lives.

