



Winter Edition

Psychcare Bulletin

MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

When working in the mental health sector of the community, we naturally feel so rewarded when we see a successful turn around in our clients after focusing on helping them for weeks and months on end, that we sometimes forget about our own personal mental health and wellbeing.

It can be so easy to put all of our energy into our work and completely forget about how we are ourselves, which can eventually lead to a decline in our work performance, mental state, and sometimes, physical state.

There are a handful of different stresses and mental states that we can experience when working in this specific field and it's so important for us and those around us in the workplace to recognise and address them so help can be given.

It is just as important for workplace supervisors to be educated on this topic as well as colleagues to ensure everybody feels enjoyment

IN THIS EDITION

P 2-3: Different Affects When Working in Mental Health
—Ally Bokos

P 4-5: What to Look for and How to Respond
—Ally Bokos

P 6: Returning to the Workplace
—Peter Horton

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DIFFERENT AFFECTS WHEN WORKING IN MENTAL HEALTH

BURNOUT

Do you ever feel like work has just completely tired you out? You feel so overwhelmed and emotionally drained that you feel you are unable to meet the requirements for your job? If so, there is a chance you are experiencing burnout. Burnout is defined as a state of prolonged physical and psychological exhaustion, which is perceived as related to the person's work, caused by excessive and prolonged stress.



“Stress is the trash of modern life. We all generate it, but if you don’t dispose of it properly, it will pile up and overtake your life.” – Danzae Pace

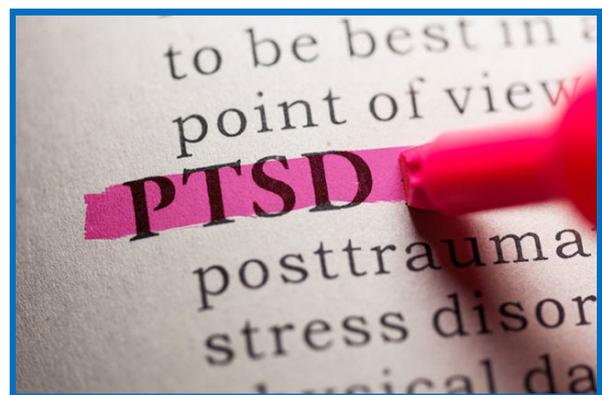


SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS

All healthcare professionals are exposed to stories about trauma events through consultations with clients, and because of this, sometimes it is possible to become traumatised and to develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) like symptoms without being involved in the traumatic event itself.

VICARIOUS TRAUMA

Vicarious trauma is the transformation in the inner experience of the therapist that comes about because of empathic engagement with client's traumatic material. Those at risk of vicarious trauma are those with prior traumatic experiences that relate to the material from their clients which include doctors and other health professionals. This term is used to include other related terms such as secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, and critical incident stress.





POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

PTSD can also result from constant exposure to traumatic events when working in the health care field. This is very common in those who have similar past trauma experiences, and when these similar events are discussed, the worker can be triggered and can produce persistent intrusive symptoms. Signs to look out for PTSD in the workplace include symptoms of anxiety, depression, negative thoughts and mood, poor general condition, and dissociation. Sometimes people can appear fatigued due to a lack of sleep.

COMPASSION FATIGUE

Compassion fatigue is defined as a state of complete exhaustion and dysfunction which results from empathic and sympathetic responses to somebody else’s suffering. This can eventually cause a decline in the professional’s ability to provide compassionate care. Compassion fatigue can develop due to a constant exposure to a client’s traumatic events, empathy for the suffering client, and a desire to absorb or improve the suffering of the client.

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS

Critical incident stress is a reaction to any critical incident that is very sudden, overwhelming, or threatening. This distress can be extremely harmful when an individual has high demands and expectations which are far from what the professional can give in regard to their needs, abilities, skills, and coping strategies. This can lead to a decline in performance and wellbeing.

FUN CORNER

1. Mike is a butcher. He is 5’10 tall. What does he weight? Meat.
2. I have seas without water, coasts without sand, towns without people, and mountains without land. What am I? A map.
3. What coat is best to put on wet? A coat of paint.

1. Meat, 2. Map, 3. Coat of wet paint.

C	A	R	E	F	M	F	H	E	R	D	D	E	S
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S	S	E	N	I	P	P	A	H	M	H	C	E	M
E	O	A	V	A	G	O	N	I	M	I	A	H	C

CARE
COMFORT
FAMILY
FOREVER

FRIEND
HAPPINESS
HOME
LAUGHTER

MEMORIES
MOMENTS

WHAT TO LOOK FOR AND HOW TO RESPOND

It is a good idea for employers to be in touch with their staff and to check in on a regular basis to look out for any signs of struggling. Approaching these situations are not always easy and can be difficult in some cases. If any unusual behaviour is suspected, it is a good idea to organise a meeting with only the supervisor and the staff member in a quiet, separate room from others to discuss how they are feeling and what the workplace can do to provide help.

Whether you are an employer or an employee, it is vital to know the signs and symptoms of these problems as the long-term effects can be detrimental. Signs and symptoms include:

- Negative attitudes
- Low commitment
- Loss of purpose
- Absenteeism
- Quickness to anger
- Job turnover
- Frustration
- Emotional numbness
- Increased sense of danger
- Reduced performance
- Anxiety
- Detachment
- Lack motivation
- Lack of energy
- Low mood
- Difficulty concentrating
- Lack of creativity
- Fatigue

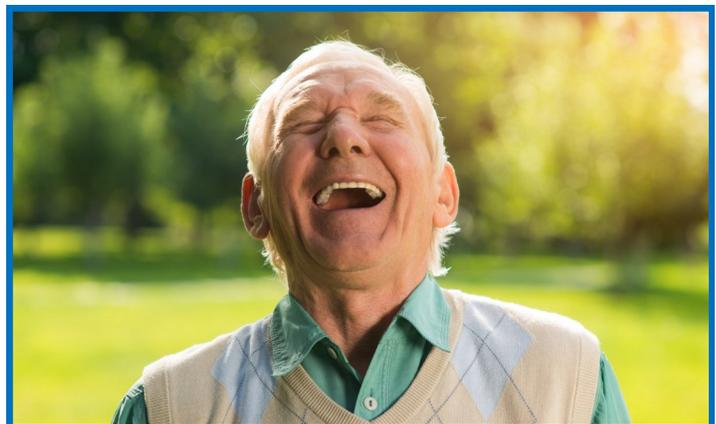


Having a good, supportive, and understanding team who are willing to ensure those around them are happy and comfortable in the workplace is absolutely vital when working in the mental health field. A supportive workplace helps to reduce stress, maintain a mental and physical healthy wellbeing, have good confidence, a greater work performance and job satisfaction.

There are multiple responsibilities that workplace supervisors and managers have in the workplace, including the awareness of mental health amongst the staff members. It is their duty to ensure that there are a wide range of support services for those who are struggling mentally due to their workload or the materials that they are exposed to.

Mental health support in the workplace should include:

- Professional supervision
- Managing case load
- Access to wellness activities
- Offering employee assistance programs



Ways that workers can take responsibility for their own well-being is participating in support activities such as individual supervision, group/peer supervision, staff straining, and staff counselling. Setting goals, tracking moods, and performing self-care such as yoga and meditation are also very beneficial to maintaining a good wellbeing.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

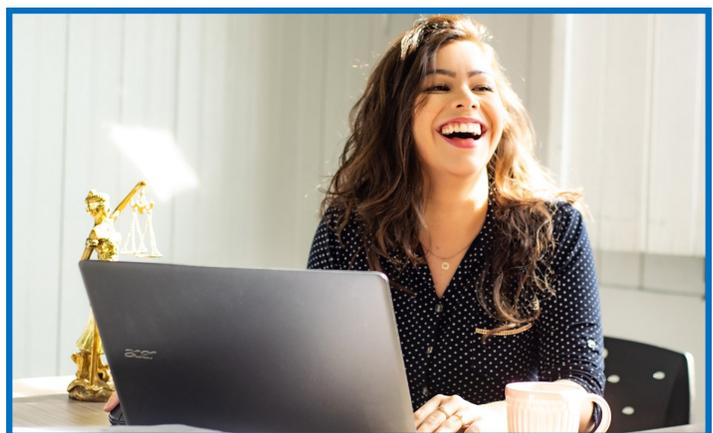
Employee assistance programs should be provided in all workplace environments, especially those involved in trauma. These programs include talking either face-to-face or over the phone to an independent advisor. They assist the employees in dealing with any problems that can have an effect on their performance, health, and wellbeing. These programs include assessment, counselling, and referral.

“Just because no one else can heal or do your inner work for you, doesn't mean you can, should, or need to do it alone.” - Lisa Olivera

RISKS FROM LACK OF SUPPORT FROM ORGANIZATIONS

Without any support from the organization, the suffering staff member is at an increased risk of a number of side effects including possible job turnover, depression, and a greater risk of accidents, incidents, injuries, and conflict in the workplace.

Education on mental health in the workplace is vital. It is so important that supervisors and colleagues are made known of the signs and symptoms of declining mental health so they can take a step in helping themselves or those amongst the workplaces. Supervisors need to ensure that staff are regularly checked in on and are aware of the support that is available to help them.



RETURNING TO THE WORKPLACE

After working from home for extended periods and returning to work, mental health care will require a health check. While many workers have remained in touch via phone and zoom, these changes tend to be work focused and often neglect to be social human and connective.

Organisations may consider steps of review as a platform towards developing a restructured environment where workers, staff, and management can develop an appropriate climate to accommodate a culture of support. Workplaces will need to create a mission statement reflecting mental health matters.

Often employees are scared to discuss mental health issues. Steps and discussion about how to promote well-being and boost employee engagement is a must in the workplace to ensure staff feel safe and supported when they come to work. Organisations don't always have the ways to tackle these new ways of doing things, therefore, identifying key personnel who are appropriate and confident about mental health will activate a climate toward normalising mental health.

HOW TO HAVE A CONVERSATION WITH AN INDIVIDUAL ABOUT THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

- Find an appropriate place—private and quiet where the person feels comfortable and equal. A neutral space.
 - Encourage talk—people can find it difficult to talk about their mental health but it helps to have an open culture where conversations about mental health are routine and normalised. Ask simple, open, and non-judgemental questions and let them explain in their own words how their mental health problem manifests the triggers, how it impacts their work, and what support they need.
 - Be honest and clear—if there are specific grounds for concern.
 - Maintain confidentiality—people need to be reassured of confidentiality. It is sensitive information and should be shared with as few as possible.
- Don't assume—never guess what symptoms an employee might have and how these might affect their ability to do their job—many people are able to manage their mental health and perform their role to a high standard but may require support measures when experiencing a difficult period.
 - Listen—everyone's experience of a mental health problem is different. Focus on the person, not the problem.
 - Encourage people to seek advice—people should speak to their GP about available support. Employee Assistance Program may also be able to arrange counselling.
 - Seek advice and support yourself.
 - Reassure people—people may not always be ready to talk straight away.
 - Help with an action plan—work with your employee to develop an individual action plan which identifies the signs of their mental health problem, triggers for stress, the possible impact

