

Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust

Stress at Work Policy

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What this Policy Covers

This Policy aims to establish standards for managers and colleagues relating to the reduction and management of work related stress. It provides guidance to managers to enable them to implement these standards, as well as providing information on sources of support available to those experiencing stress.

The Trust is committed to protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of our colleagues. It recognises that workplace stress is a health and safety issue which has a negative impact on its colleagues and patients and acknowledges the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors. The Trust is therefore committed to tackling the causes of workplace stress and providing support for colleagues and managers to reduce stress where possible in the workplace.

Definitions

For this policy, the Trust has adopted the definition of stress used by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) i.e. "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them".

There is a difference between "challenge" and "stress". Challenge can be motivating and positive; it is often essential in a job and improves performance. However, stress is the negative response to too great a challenge or pressure, or too many demands, with which the person finds it difficult to cope. Stress can be caused by pressures at home, work or both.

Stress is a state, not an illness, and where stress lasts for only a short time there is usually no lasting effect.

However, if the stress is sustained over a longer period, it can have a significant impact on physical and mental health, work performance and morale. Therefore, reducing work-related stress and making it more manageable brings clear benefits to you and the Trust.

Principles

The Trust seeks to have an organisational culture that is both supportive and empowering, with a management style that reflects this culture in accordance with the Trust's 4Ward Behaviours.

The Trust supports the HSE view that anyone can experience stress at some point of their life and that work-related stress exists where someone feels they cannot cope with what is being asked of them.

The Trust also recognises that stress affects you in different ways (what one person may see as a significant stressor, another person may not) therefore each reported case will be dealt with on an individual basis.

Responsibilities

The Trust recognises that it has a duty of care towards you and a legal obligation to provide a safe working environment. Managers, with appropriate support for themselves, play an important role in facilitating and supporting you to carry out your job effectively and to contribute to the success of your department and the Trust.

Managers must:

- work proactively to identify where potential situations might cause stress and follow the guidance outlined in this policy to help prevent stress occurring
- identify and/or respond to issues of concern promptly and seek constructive solutions.
- recognise your own limitations and seek training and support as required.

You are:

- encouraged to take personal responsibility for yourself and to support others to do the same.
- advised if you feel under undue pressure that you should tell someone and seek assistance as soon as possible e.g. your Line Manager, Occupational Health, Human Resources, your Trade Union Representative, Health & Wellbeing Guardian or Freedom to Speak Up Guardian etc.

You have an active role to play in maintaining your health and wellbeing and communicating with others is a helpful step towards resolving any stress that may be affecting you. Stress isn't always work related and the Trust will also provide support/signposting where it can in relation to stress factors outside of work. The Trust intranet gives access to the Trust's Health & Wellbeing offer for colleagues, a centralised resource which signposts you to health & wellbeing support including Psychological support.



Policy in practice

Causes

The HSE emphasises that well-designed, organised and managed work helps to maintain and promote individual health and wellbeing. Where there has been insufficient attention to job design, workload or work organisation and management, the benefits associated with “good work” can be lost, possibly resulting in work-related stress.

Risk identification and Assessment

The HSE has identified six key “Management Standards” (summarised below) which, when met, can lead to high levels of health, wellbeing and organisational performance. They provide a framework that can be used to identify and help minimise the impact of work-related stress.

HSE Management Standards:

Demands - You can cope with the demands of the job.

Control - You can have a say about the way work is done.

Support - You receive adequate information and support from colleagues and managers.

Relationships - You are not subjected to unacceptable behaviour (e.g. bullying or harassment).

Roles - You understand your role and responsibilities.

Change - You are involved in and consulted about any organisational changes.

A **Workplace Risk Assessment** must be carried out by **line managers** at least once per year covering their areas of responsibility and returned back to the Health and Safety Department for review. This will include a section relating to workplace stressors.

Additionally, each time it is identified that a colleague is demonstrating signs of work-related stress **an individual Workplace Stress Risk Assessment** should be conducted by their line manager or senior line manager. This could be triggered by changes that have occurred within the team or the working environment, but it is also important to consider your working environment if you are remote working. This helps to identify what is causing stress with the aim of making reasonable changes to the work or work environment if necessary. Detailed guidance regarding Stress Risk Assessments can be found in the Stress at Work Toolkit associated with this Policy.

Workplace Risk Assessments will be reviewed by the H&S Department annually and concerns regarding workplace stress will be raised with the relevant line manager, copying in the appropriate senior manager within the Division and HR Business Partner. Action may be taken with the aim of making reasonable changes to the work or work environment if necessary. Further to this, **individual Stress Risk Assessments** and an analysis of sickness data relating to that department/area may be required. Audited data will be presented on a quarterly basis by the Health & Safety Department to the Trust’s Health & Safety Committee and the JNCC.

Additional information can be found at the Health and Safety Executive's website at:
www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index

This includes helpful resources that can be used at organisational, departmental or individual level to:

- identify work-related issues that might have an adverse effect on health and work performance
- assist in the management of cases of stress
- identify reasonable adjustments that could be implemented to reduce risk of adverse effects.

Prevention

Organisational arrangements

The Trust aims to ensure that you work in a positive, safe and supportive working environment by seeking to:

- promote supportive management behaviours
- provide a framework of employment, health and safety policies, systems and monitoring to support managers and you to ensure effective work performance and minimise the risk of work-related stress
- provide advice and information to you about stress to promote preventative measures and ensure early intervention in cases of work-related stress
- promote equality of opportunity and provide a workplace free from harassment and bullying
- foster effective workload allocation and feedback on performance
- promote effective communication throughout the Trust
- provide information and training for all managers to enable them to conduct Stress Risk Assessments
- ensure effective and timely consultation with staff representatives on proposed actions relating to preventing work-related stress
- provide appropriate colleague support services.

Managers

To help minimise risk of work-related stress managers should:

- ensure good communications, particularly where there are organisational or procedural changes
- display supportive management behaviour and foster healthy working relationships between colleagues
- consider and act upon each of the HSE Management Standards in 6.2 above
- ensure that jobs are properly designed, with realistic demands and workload, and that expectations and job role are clear
- ensure the appropriate level and delegation of work with clear responsibilities and regular support.
- ensure that you are trained to undertake the demands of your job and can contribute to decisions about how the job is done
- ensure that there are regular opportunities to discuss the work and obtain feedback on performance (e.g. regular one-to-one meetings and/or team meetings)
- monitor working hours and holidays to ensure that you are not pressured to work excessive hours and that you are able to take the breaks that you are entitled to.
- ensure that bullying and harassment are not tolerated
- be alert to signs of problems and offer additional support to any colleague known to be experiencing stress
- seek advice and support at an early stage from Occupational Health or Human Resources if difficulties arise.

Self-Care

It is essential that you play an active role in contributing to your own wellbeing and development.

To minimise the risk of work-related stress you should:

- Inform your line manager (or Occupational Health/ Human Resources) as soon as possible if you are feeling stressed so that immediate support can be offered
- support colleagues by providing appropriate information and by sharing knowledge and resources where appropriate
- raise issues of concern at an early stage and seek constructive solutions
- make use of available support and training resources
- engage in discussion about your performance and act on feedback

Management of individual cases of stress

Managers have a key role to play in identifying stress (whether you work on site or remotely) and should be alert to signs such as:

- confusion and indecision
- difficulty concentrating
- poor memory
- changes in eating habits
- mood swings affecting behaviour
- twitchy, nervous behaviour
- changes in attendance, such as arriving late or taking more time off
- changes in personal appearance
- working/sending emails at hours outside of your usual working pattern

If signs of stress are identified, a **Wellbeing Conversation** should be offered to you at the earliest opportunity. This conversation may be with the line manager or another appropriately trained colleague (Wellbeing Conversation Facilitator) within the Trust with the purpose of offering/signposting support for you. **A Personal Wellbeing Action Plan** can be developed by you in discussion with your Line Manager/Wellbeing Conversation Facilitator. A Stress Risk Assessment should also be completed by the Line Manager (see 6.2 above).

Managers should be flexible in exploring where reasonable adjustments can be made for colleagues experiencing stress or where phased returns to work are necessary following stress-related absence. Reasonable adjustments would depend on the circumstances and service needs but may include:

- a temporary change to starting and finishing times
- temporary adjustment of working duties or work area
- additional training/coaching support
- more flexible working arrangements
- more regular supervision if appropriate

The Trust offers a range of flexible working options and advice can be sought from Human Resources, Occupational Health, your Staff Side (Trade Union) Representatives and Staff Networks.

Support available

The Trust's Health and Wellbeing Offer on the Intranet provides links to support and guidance relating to key areas of health & wellbeing.

Additionally, the Working Well/ Occupational Health Intranet pages contain tools and advice for you on identifying stress, developing your own action plan to build your resilience, and also signposts to internal and external sources of support. This includes free counselling and physiotherapy to help with the physical and emotional symptoms of stress, as well as other holistic therapies and support.

Supporting Colleagues Through Traumatic Incidents / Stressful Incidents, Complaints and Claims

You may as part of your employment experience or be involved in a traumatic or stressful Incident, complaint or claim. Information on how to manage and support you following such an event can be found in the "[Supporting our Workforce Infographic](#)" on the Intranet under the heading "Supporting Colleagues Through Traumatic Incidents / Stressful Incidents, Complaints and Claims".

This includes signposting to relevant policies, protocols and support services available to you and managers.

Supporting Colleagues Who are In Crisis

The Trust is committed to supporting anyone who is experiencing symptoms of a crisis and will aim to do all it can to signpost to the necessary help. This will include signposting to specialist services. You are encouraged to speak to your Line Manager, one of the Trust's Mental Health First Aiders, your Trade Union Representative, Occupational Health or Human Resources if you are worried about yourself or a colleague.

Immediate support is available from:

Herefordshire and Worcestershire Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub Helpline 24 hours a day, 365 days a year 0808 196 9127
Free NOSS Counselling 24/7 01978 780479

Implementation Plan

This policy will be available on the Trust Intranet.

A policy briefing will be developed for Divisional Management Boards, Directorate Meetings and Worcestershire weekly.

[HR Key Documents Supporting Documents](#)