

Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust

Stress at Work Policy

Department/Service	Human Resources								
Accountable Director	Chief People Officer								
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Target Organisation	Worcestershire Acute Hospitals Trust								

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As a controlled document, this document should not be saved onto local or network drives and should always be accessed from the intranet.

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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 well-being of our colleagues. It recognises that workplace stress is a health and safety issue that negatively impacts 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 such that 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 significantly impact physical and mental health, work performance and morale. Therefore, reducing work-related stress and making it more manageable brings clear benefits to colleagues and the Trust.

Principles

The Trust seeks to have a supportive and empowering organisational culture, with a management style that reflects this culture in accordance with the Trust's Values. Guidance and support will be available for managers from Human Resources, Occupational Health, The Psychological Wellbeing Service and training/development opportunities.

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

The Trust also recognises that stress affects people 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 colleagues and a legal obligation to provide a safe working environment. With appropriate support, managers play an important

role in facilitating and supporting you in carrying out your job effectively and contributing 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 and the Stress at Work Toolkit to help prevent stress from occurring
- identify and/or respond to issues of concern promptly and seek constructive solutions e.g. seek Occupational Health Support.
- recognise their own limitations and seek training and support as required.

You are:

- encouraged to take personal responsibility for yourself and support others in doing the same
- encouraged to use the [Employee Self-assessment](#) to explore the factors contributing to your stress, plan a way forward and make some small changes to help you manage these stressors. Additionally, you can use this tool to help you prepare for a discussion with your line manager. Think beyond your reaction to being stressed and try to understand the contributory factors. Information and a conversation guide have been prepared to assist your line manager to understand what support you may need
- advised if you feel under undue pressure, that you will likely benefit from telling someone or seeking assistance as soon as possible, e.g. your Line Manager, Occupational Health (either self-refer or line manager referral), GP, 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 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) that, when met, can lead to high levels of health, well-being and organisational performance. They provide a framework for identifying and helping 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.

Each time it is identified that a colleague is demonstrating signs of work-related stress, colleagues should be encouraged to complete an **Employee Self-Assessment**. The self-assessment will help colleagues identify the factors that may be contributing to their experience of stress at work. The self-assessment can also help support colleagues to consider how these issues may be resolved or what support may be required to help manage the stressors. Once colleagues have a better understanding of these aspects, this will help support a discussion with their line manager; the line manager may wish to refer to the **Manager’s Conversation Guide** to help support this initial conversation. Starting a conversation is an important step in preventing work-related stress. Further details regarding the Employee Self-Assessment and the Manager’s Conversation Guide can be found in the Stress at Work Toolkit associated with this Policy.

There is a requirement for a **Workplace Risk Assessment** to be carried out by **line managers** at least once per year covering their areas of responsibility and returned to the Health and Safety Department for review. This will include a section relating to workplace stressors. If it is identified that workplace stress may be a concern within a particular area or department, action may be taken with the aim of making reasonable changes to the work or work environment if necessary. Concerns regarding workplace stress will be raised with the appropriate senior manager within the Division and HR Business Partner. The Health and Safety Committee will also be provided with an overview of any concerns via Divisional Reports within quarterly meetings.

Additional information can be found at the Health and Safety Executive's website at:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/index.htm>

This includes helpful resources that can be used at organisational, departmental or individual levels 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 the 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 the tools for managers to enable them to conduct conversations with colleagues about any factors which may be contributing to their experience of stress at work.
- 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 the risk of work-related stress, managers should:

- ensure good communication, 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 as detailed above
- ensure that jobs are properly designed, with realistic demands and workload, and that expectations and job roles 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 you are not pressured to work excessive hours and can take the breaks 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
- be familiar with the Managers Conversation guide in order to facilitate effective and compassionate conversation with colleagues presenting with workplace stress and co-produce an action plan

- 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 well-being 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, you should be offered a **Wellbeing Conversation** 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. Where it is identified that stress is potential risk for the colleague, the colleague should be encouraged to complete an **Employee Self- Assessment**; this assessment can then be discussed with the colleague, and the line manager should utilise the **Managers Conversation Guide** to support this conversation.

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 absences. 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 in key areas of health & well-being.

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 signposting 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 Involved in Traumatic, Stressful Incidents or Complaints

You may, as part of your employment experience, be involved in a traumatic or stressful Incident, complaint, or claim. The "Supporting Colleagues involved in Traumatic, Stressful Incidents & Complaints Policy" provides guidance to colleagues on the support that is available to them, regardless of the extent of their involvement.

Supporting Colleagues Who Are In Crisis

The Trust is committed to supporting anyone 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. Call 111 and choose option 2 for urgent mental health support.

Implementation Plan

This policy will be available on the Trust Intranet.

Weekly policy briefings will be developed for the Divisional Management Boards, Directorate, Meetings, and Worcestershire weekly.

[Stress at Work Supporting Documents](#)