

MENTAL HEALTH

With local charity Mind Jersey, commissioning two films aimed at increasing mental health awareness and the World Mental Health Day on 10th October 2014, what more can be done in Jersey to reduce the stigma?

According to the latest report by the U.K. government's Chief Medical Officer, Professor Dame Sally Davies, 1 in 4 people will suffer a Mental illness in their lifetime. Around 70 million working days are lost because of stress, anxiety and other mental health conditions each year, a rise of a quarter since 2009. Last year this amounted to a cost of up to £100 billion to the U.K. economy.

In her report, Dame Sally called on the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, the NHS watchdog, to weigh up the costs of allowing workers with depression or anxiety to be fast-tracked for treatment, however, this costs money which we know the NHS simply do not have.

Yes, the budget on Mental Health care needs to increase in Jersey as it does in the U.K however, employers can help prevent many work related stress disorders from overcoming their employees by ensuring that they have relevant systems in place first, and this may prevent conditions such as anxiety rearing themselves to the surface in the first place.

Of those employees receiving medical care for mental illness they say that it is good but is not the reason they work well. The reason they work well is because of their employer who supports them.

At our clinics we see many individuals sent to us by their employers looking for help with mental illnesses such as anxiety, depression, panic attacks, social anxiety and executive burn-out otherwise known as "adrenal fatigue". When assessing these individuals we find that many of them have been on a slow spiral downwards for several months before they have sought help. The reasons behind their ill health may vary from difficult relationships at work, feeling undervalued as an employee, lack of support, lack of self-esteem and confidence, lack of fulfilment, the list goes on. With others their illness has stemmed from an external source within their family such as bereavement, divorce or an ill family member requiring care.

We believe that employers could do far more to support their employees by offering Mental Health Awareness days and regular confidential Mental Health assessments via qualified external sources in order to combat this alarming rising figure.

They could also have in place a protocol for any of their employees struggling with their mental health by offering flexible working hours, or part-time working post-illness which could be a key way to prevent sufferers from having to take too much time off work.

Quite often anxiety and depression leaves sufferers feeling helpless, out of control and without any direction of how to get better. By offering a confidential service whereby our clients can talk openly about all areas of their lives, personal and working, we can then ascertain what areas are causing the imbalance and set about agreeing a goal and action plan. This may include helping them to approach their employer about their issues and worries and making suggestions of perhaps re-structuring their week in order to cope with the job at hand, identifying any areas of training that may be required and teaching them to communicate effectively with their team. With a plan of action, this offers the individual a feeling of control over the situation which immediately creates optimism for the future ahead.

Professor Dame Sally, says that employers can make a significant difference to the health of their staff. *"They can make it by actually talking about it, knowing how their people are, whether they have ill health, supporting them by giving them flexible working if they need it, by reducing stigma."*

With figures from the report stating that an estimated 60 to 70 per cent of people with common mental health disorders were in full time work this suggests that no company is without this problem within their work force. Employers have a duty of care to their employees and must treat their mental health the same as their physical health.



In order to increase awareness and understanding about mental health, the local charity Mind Jersey has recently revealed two films featuring their ambassadors Beth Moore and Stephen Le Quesne who speak openly and honestly about how depression affected them. They can be watched online via the link <http://vimeo.com/103995679>

How can employers help?

Firstly, employers need to understand that their working relationships stack very high on the chart of the most important relationships in your life. The only other relationship to equal this in importance is that of your family. If you think how long you spend at work each week, you can see the negative impact an unsupportive or unapproachable manager could have on his staff. A good boss may encourage home working, be supportive on influencers outside of work, and encourage a good work and home life balance.

Some of the world's largest companies such as, Google, General Mills (the company behind Cheerios and Häagen Dazs ice cream) and Goldman Sachs are embracing eastern spirituality by practising techniques such as mindfulness and meditation.

The late Steve Jobs told his biographer, Walter Isaacson, *"If you just sit and observe, you will see how restless your mind is. If you try to calm it, it only makes it worse, but over time it does calm, and when it does, there's room to hear more subtle things – that's when your intuition starts to blossom and you start to see things more clearly and be in the present more. Your mind just slows down, and you see a tremendous expanse in the moment. You see so much more than you could see before. It's a discipline; you have to practise it."*

This may all sound like New Age mumbo-jumbo, but there is a growing amount of academic research that provides a feasible explanation as to why meditation helps with stress reduction. It is shown to reduce cortisol, a hormone related to stress. When cortisol drops, the mind grows calmer and gains the stability to become more focused.

It is encouraging to read about large corporate giants starting to set the mental health awareness wheels in motion and it is clearly doing their employees no harm. Other supportive ideas could be corporate wellness days for key staff and managers, Spa or relaxation days or in-house yoga, pilates and meditation sessions during lunch times.

It is so important for companies to attract and find great talent but the key point is to retain and look after that talent.

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