Beyond the clinics

Mind full or mindful: mental health awareness for the team

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Mental health problems are common, with around one in five of the working age population experiencing a mental health condition at any time. The veterinary profession is known to be a high-pressure occupation, with research showing that veterinary surgeons have a higher than average incidence of suicide and poor mental health. There is ample evidence that people who suffer from mental health difficulties are likely to be less effective at work, more likely to be absent and to experience a poorer quality of life. However, equally important as sickness absence is what is known as presenteeism — which is a term that refers to being at work while being functionally impaired. Presenteeism, which is especially important in safety critical or high judgement roles, is thought to cause one and a half times as much loss to industry as sickness absence.

The media often suggest that solving workplace stress requires more workplace counsellors or having rapid access to trained therapists for anyone who is stressed. It is thus perhaps understandable that when managers are faced with distressed individuals, they will assume that the correct intervention is healthcare-focused. However, there is strong evidence that supportive colleagues and line managers can make a great deal of difference to people's psychological well-being. In fact, social support, a term which refers to the strength and quality of the bonds between people and groups, has been shown to be one of the most important factors in determining how people respond to challenging events. Thus, developing and maintaining a supportive workplace is likely to produce benefits for colleagues' health and wellbeing as well as benefits for the business as a whole.

This presentation will provide an overview of the evidence on this topic from a preventative medicine viewpoint. Specifically, the information presented will look at what the published evidence suggests can be done to prevent workers from being adversely affected by poor mental health, detecting early on when they have been and treating those who do unfortunately develop a formal mental health disorder in an effective and timely manner. Topics discussed will include:

- The impact of managers, and colleagues, on mental health

- Stigma and failing to seek help for mental health problems as well as peer support programmes
- Active monitoring and the short-term management of traumatic stress reactions
- Evidence-based approaches to the treatment of common mental health disorders.

Attendees will leave apprised of the current evidence which, it is hoped, will stimulate discussion and debate on this important topic.

KEY LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Understanding common mental health problems at work
- Understanding the role of social connections in relation to mental health at work
- Understanding evidence-based approaches to sustaining resilience at work

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Which of these is NOT recognized by the Health and Safety Executive as a contributing factor associated with workplace stress?
 - (A) Stressed employees indicate that they receive inadequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors
 - (B) Stressed employees indicate that they are unable to cope with the demands of their job
 - (C) Stressed employees indicate that the organization does not engage with them regarding organizational change
 - (D) Stressed employees indicate that they receive poor salaries
2. Which of the following would NOT be considered a common mental health disorder?
 - (A) Anxiety
 - (B) Bipolar disorder
 - (C) Adjustment disorder
 - (D) Acute (post-traumatic) stress disorder
3. When do people most commonly seek support?
 - (A) When they first realize that they have a concern
 - (B) When their friends first tell them that they are worried about them
 - (C) When their performance drops at work
 - (D) When they reach crisis point

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