



UK NATIONAL WORK-STRESS NETWORK CONFERENCE

STEVE WRIGHTON OF HMP BULLINGDON AND MICK LONGSTAFF OF HMP LOW NEWTON, BOTH MEMBERS OF THE POA HEALTH AND SAFETY CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE, REPORT ON THE 18TH UK NATIONAL WORK-STRESS NETWORK (UKNWSN) ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2016.

The conference took place on 19th and 20th November at the Hillscourt Conference Centre in Birmingham. The conference theme this year was 'Mental Health in the Workplace – Tackling Work-Stress in a Changing Working Environment'.

Over 80 union delegates and members of the Work Stress Group attended and heard from a range of speakers, undertook workshops on different aspects of stress in the workplace and were able to network with other union representatives discussing issues, which affect our workplaces.

The UK National Work-Stress Network is committed to the eradication of the causes of work-related stress and associated illnesses. It campaigns to advance this aim through its involvement with the Hazards Campaign; and in conjunction with the TUC, European organisations, within UK Trades Union structures.

The Network consists of hundreds of like-minded people, some of whom have suffered the consequences of work-related stress. Amongst their numbers are experienced caseworkers, counsellors, occupational health workers, trades union

lay and paid officers and those who are just determined to see effective management, which recognises the needs of the workforce, as well as of business. The Work Stress Network regularly attend the POA Annual Conference in May.

The conference opened with a speakers' panel, which comprised Professor Kevin Daniels, Anne Mathie, Wayne Bates and Rob Johnston.

Improving working lives

Professor Daniels spoke on his work leading the Work, Learning and Wellbeing Programme, which looks at what can be done to improve the working lives of employees, and evidences the outcomes so that only schemes that actually work are used.

An actual example of a scheme used by an employer showed that:

- Operating hours improved by seven percent;
- Output increased by 14 percent;
- There was a 24 percent reduction in time delays;
- There was a 33 percent reduction in accidents;
- There was a 77 percent reduction in lost time incidents;

- There was an eight percent improvement in workers satisfied or very satisfied.

One of the key things to come out of the studies was that workers wanted good quality work and this was seen as being important for their wellbeing. They wanted secure, skilled work, to be involved in decision-making and have a good work/life balance.

This good quality work needs to be supported with training for skills, wellbeing training for 'at risk' work and the chance to practice these skills, management training and proper implementation of these schemes.

Mental health

Anne Mathie works in the field of mental health, supporting people experiencing mental health issues. Since 2005, she has been an active instructor of Scotland's Mental Health First Aid programme for employers and employees.

Anne opened her presentation with the question "how you doing?"; a basic everyday question we all use. She asked if we are really prepared for the answer, especially if someone says they are struggling.



“One in four of us will experience a mental health problem in any given year.”

One in four of us will experience a mental health problem in any given year. That could be you, your friend, family, colleague, manager or employer. Her argument is that learning a little bit more about mental health, and then talking about it, can prevent mental ill health.

The definition of work-related stress, depression or anxiety is; ‘a harmful reaction people have to undue pressures and demands placed on them at work’.

Some interesting facts:

- The number of cases of work-related stress, depression or anxiety in 2015/16 was 488,000 cases, a prevalence rate of 1,510 per 100,000 workers.
- The number of working days lost due to these conditions in 2015/16 was 11.7 million days, averaging 23.9 days lost per case.
- In 2015/16, stress accounted for 37 percent of all work-related ill health cases, and 45 percent of all working days lost due to ill health.

Teaching staff

Wayne Bates is a national negotiating official for NASUWT. He discussed the issues affecting teaching staff, including increasing workloads,

academies, poor retention of newly qualified staff, using unqualified people in teaching roles, lack of pay rises and bullying (by students and management), especially in academy or free schools, where there appears to be very little recourse for employees.

The ‘Dying to Work’ campaign

Rob Johnston is the TUC policy and campaigns officer at the Midlands TUC and leads the campaign ‘Dying to Work’. This focuses on the effects of terminal illnesses and work, with a special reference to the need for employment laws to be changed to afford specific protection against heartless employers.

The 2010 Equality Act does offer some protection for terminally ill employees, however, the Act still allows employers to dismiss a terminally ill employee if they fail a capability assessment with ‘reasonable adjustments’.

The Dying to Work campaign would like to see terminal illness recognised as a ‘protected characteristic’ so that an employee with a terminal illness would enjoy a ‘protected period’, where they could not be dismissed as a result of their condition.

Such protection would give every person battling terminal conditions the choice of how to spend their final months and the peace of mind to know their job was protected along with the future financial security of their family.

The TUC is asking organisations to sign a voluntary charter that sets out an agreed way in which their employees will be supported, protected and guided throughout their employment, following a terminal diagnosis.

The charter states the following:

- We recognise that terminal illness requires support and understanding and not additional and avoidable stress and worry.
- Terminally ill workers will be secure in the knowledge that we will support them following their diagnosis and we recognise that safe and reasonable work can help maintain dignity, offer a valuable distraction and can be therapeutic in itself.
- We will provide our employees with the security of work, peace of mind and the right to choose the best course of action for themselves and their families which helps them through this challenging period with dignity and without undue financial loss. >>

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- We support the TUC's Dying to Work campaign so that all employees battling terminal illness have adequate employment protection and have their death in service benefits protected for the loved ones they leave behind.

Please show your support to this valuable campaign by visiting the website www.dyingtowork.co.uk to find out further information and sign their petition. HMP Low Newton plans to take a motion to next year's POA conference to ask NOMS to support this important charter.

There followed a good exchange of points of view, as delegates asked questions of the panelists and also discussed experiences from their workplaces.

Workshops

Mick attended a workshop on 'Making Better Jobs' run by Kevin Daniels.

The 'What Works Centre for Wellbeing' is a UK-wide initiative to enable policy-makers, local authorities, employers and others to use evidence of wellbeing impact in decision-making and to improve people's lives, by translating scientific evaluation of wellbeing measures into easy-to-use information about effectiveness, cost and applicability. The Work, Learning and Wellbeing Evidence Programme focuses on protecting and enhancing the wellbeing of workers, adult learners and those seeking work.

The public engagement activities of the Centre found that various stakeholders' groups consider 'job quality' to be an important contributory factor to wellbeing and one that required further attention. Although the features of 'good' jobs are well known, the scientific literature is much less clear on how to build 'good' jobs and interventions focused on job quality have shown mixed evidence for their success.

In this session, Professor Kevin Daniels, the lead for the Work, Learning and Wellbeing Evidence Programme, presented detailed findings from one of the first evidence reviews of the Centre that is focused on finding out what other factors may contribute to building high quality jobs (e.g. training, alignment of job redesign with other organisational initiatives).

The session explored participants' experiences and views about building better quality jobs. The interactive nature of the session allowed participants to learn from others and explore practically how to help organisations build better quality jobs in different circumstances.

Mental health at work

Steve attended a workshop on Mental Health at Work, facilitated by Richard Wakerell, a mental health training manager for Mind.

During an open discussion, delegates heard about what makes good mental health, and how common mental health problems are per 100 people.

- Depression: 2.6 in 100
- Anxiety: 4.7 in 100
- Mixed anxiety and depression: 9.7 in 100
- Phobias: 2.6 in 100
- OCD: 1.3 in 100
- Panic disorder: 1.2 in 100
- Post-traumatic stress disorder: 3.0 in 100.

The group looked at these conditions and how their effects relate to the workplace, and what pressures at work can trigger the onset of these conditions:

- Long hours and no breaks;
- Unrealistic expectations or deadlines;
- High-pressure environments;
- Poor working environments;
- Unmanageable workloads or lack of control over work;
- Negative relationships or poor communication;
- Job insecurity or change management; and
- Lone working.

It is fair to say the most POA members are currently experiencing all of the above working conditions in the current climate in our prisons. The reality is, that many members will be suffering a detrimental effect in their mental health and it must be remembered that the employer has a duty of care over your mental health, as well as that of your physical health. Of course, the real problem is that of disclosure, many feel that there is a stigma surrounding reporting mental health to the employer as well as to friends and family, and men are far less likely to disclose mental ill health compared to women. Early recognition of mental health conditions and seeking the help, which is

available, will in most cases ease the onset of the condition and promote recovery.

Help with mental health is available from many sources from your own GP to the employers schemes, and confidential help can be obtained from Mind at www.mind.org.uk and the POA's stress and support counselling phone line on **0800 107 6585**.

Mental health first aid

Both Steve and Mick attended the 'Mental Health in the Workplace' workshop. The example examined in this workshop was from Scotland where work has already started. We drew from those experiences to discuss the provision of support for English workers, where mental health is present and yet largely ignored. Physical first aid support is commonly found in most workplaces but not mental health first aid. It was interesting to see that the Scottish Prison Service use the training package discussed. This issue is to be raised as a motion to next year's POA Conference.

We discussed how employers often ignore the need for their employees' mental health requirements to be protected. Representatives should be using section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, to ensure suitable and sufficient risk assessments are completed, including the risk to the employee's mental health.

The aims of Mental Health First Aid training are to preserve life, provide initial help, prevent the conditioning getting worse and promote recovery as well as providing comfort. It will not make the person undertaking the course a counsellor or a therapist.

Overall, another excellent conference, which allowed us to spread the word of prison officers especially at a time of increased media attention and public sympathy. It was interesting to note that other unions' attitudes to prison officers appear to have changed over the years that we have been attending both this conference as well as Hazards.

