

STAFF WELLBEING

What works for your workforce

Improving employee wellbeing means finding out what actually does makes staff feel well placed in your organisation. Bridget Juniper provides some pointers

If trusts are serious about improving the wellbeing of their staff, they need to evaluate the needs of their workers from the outset. This helps avoid the usual pitfalls of developing programmes that fail to tackle key problems and can be a waste of time and resource.

More and more research is making the link between employee wellbeing and performance. So the NHS health and wellbeing review led by Steve Boorman is very welcome. By investing in staff wellbeing, organisations can optimise performance and actively tackle absence.

At least this is the theory. Sadly, many organisations get it woefully wrong. Their intentions are well meant, their programmes are costly but they are destined to fail. How can the NHS avoid these traps?

The first step is to define exactly what is meant by employee wellbeing.

Is it a regard for all aspects of wellbeing or is it a keenness to pursue particular aspects of a workforce's health and fitness?

We define the term as "that part of employees' overall wellbeing that they perceive to be determined primarily by work and which can be influenced by workplace interventions".

This is far reaching and can identify wellbeing issues way

'It is wise to articulate whether your trust's desire for a wellbeing programme is philanthropic or commercial'

beyond healthy canteen options and lunchtime yoga. There is little point in a trust introducing subsidised gym memberships or cycle to work schemes if the core source of impaired wellbeing is worry over job security because of organisational change.

Once a trust has agreed its definition, it is also wise to articulate why it wishes to embark on a wellbeing programme.

Is it a desire to be more philanthropic or is it driven by a more commercial imperative such as wanting to bring down absenteeism?

If it is a more commercial reason, it is important to capture the impact of wellbeing issues on a particular outcome such as attendance, so that an employer can measure the relationship between the two directly.

Following on from this, a successful wellbeing programme needs to be evidence based. It is

critically important to conduct a robust assessment of employees so the specific needs of a workforce can be quantified. An assessment can also determine prime drivers of performance such as absence (see chart).

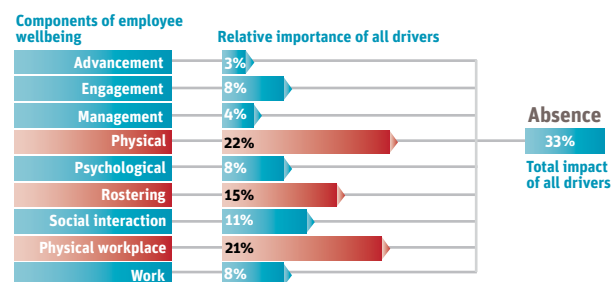
Zenon Consulting managing director Julia Tybura says the use of employee wellbeing is an essential tool in the HR director's toolkit.

"It is a key indicator in the barometer of organisational health and should be used a lot more than it is at present. Chief executives and HR directors need to be passionate about the healthiness of their people, as well as the 'wealthiness' of their



HOW WELLBEING IMPACTS ON ABSENTEEISM

Key drivers of absence across nine different areas of wellbeing for a study undertaken for a large NHS trust



Source: Work and Well-Being 2008



PUBLICISE YOUR ORGANISATION'S IDEAS

In the next few weeks we will be publishing articles on lean techniques in primary care and on collective workplace bullying – or “mobbing”. If you would like to highlight your organisation’s ideas and examples of best practice both in *HSJ* and at the online Resource Centre, email hsjresourcecentre@emap.com



WELLBEING TOP TIPS

- Be clear about your definition of employee wellbeing
- Ensure your leadership team supports the programme and is aligned behind recommendations and actions
- Be clear about why you are starting out on such a programme
- You can only manage what you measure; an off the shelf solution that lacks a needs analysis is likely to fail
- Be prepared to evaluate changes in wellbeing and indicators of performance over time to demonstrate value and progress

‘Chief executives and HR directors need to be passionate about the healthiness of their people’

deliver on a strategy that meets directly the needs of its people. These needs will vary from trust to trust and from role to role according to the type of work staff perform and the current culture of the workplace.

Wellbeing programmes need not incur extra cost. A needs analysis can identify priority areas. It can also shine a light on those initiatives that are of little consequence to staff so investment can be redirected where it is most required. ● *Bridget Juniper is founder and director of Work and Well-Being.*

FIND OUT MORE

- NHS health and wellbeing review
- ➔ www.nhshealthandwellbeing.org
- Zenon Consulting
- ➔ www.zenonconsulting.com
- Working for a Healthier Tomorrow*, Department for Work and Pensions 2008
- ➔ www.workingforhealth.gov.uk/
- Carol-Blacks-Review**
- Work and Well-Being
- ➔ www.workandwellbeing.com

ACTION ON ABSENTEEISM: A CASE STUDY

Client A large trust

Problem Absenteeism and attrition costs totalling £7m each year

Objective Enhance the wellbeing of staff to improve attendance and retention

Action An employee wellbeing assessment and correlated findings with patterns in absence and intentions to quit.

Analysis identified a clear hierarchy of need for different employee groups ranging, from shift systems through to the physical workplace and impact on

physical health. It also yielded surprising insights into reasons for absence and attrition.

The output was an evidence based wellbeing strategy to tackle performance and improve wellbeing.

Key features included an overhaul of the shift management system to address the impact of work on physical health and feeling isolated and its effect on family life.

Particular aspects of the physical workplace were also improved.

organisations. Gaining an appreciation of what makes staff tick and gets them out of bed to come to work happily and well motivated is vital in improving, for example, the patient experience.

“The national staff survey can help gauge this, but only to a certain extent. A real shift in culture is usually needed when analysing and improving organisational health and that, in turn, takes courageous conversations, strong leadership and continuous learning.”

By being able to measure wellbeing issues that staff face, an organisation is more likely to