

Working for wellbeing

When it comes to wellbeing, work can often be considered central to a person's needs and a key part of their route to recovery. It is widely accepted that work is generally good for health, beneficial to wellbeing and a lack of work, especially for long periods, is detrimental to health and wellbeing. The benefits of work apply equally to people who have a mental illness. The prevalence of mental illness in the population leads to lost working time, lower productivity, long-term absence and about 1 million people live on incapacity benefits due to a mental health problem (Oxford Economics, 2007).

When unemployment is considered alongside absence, the problem is even bigger. Unemployment damages people's health and wellbeing (Waddell and Burton, 2006) and although not often viewed in this way, it should be thought about as a public health problem, just like obesity or smoking.

Aside from the obvious health issues, mental ill health does not only have an effect on the wellbeing of the individual and their ability to work, this in turn has an impact on the national economy.



However, it does not make sense only to help people once they are already unwell, claiming benefits and suffering from the negative effects of worklessness.

Early intervention is the most effective way of dealing with sickness absence and helping people to stay in work.

A visit to a GP and the start of a sick period can be the start of a long period of sickness, and it is at this stage that support

to stay in work or to return to work as quickly as possible can be vital.

The Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme is not only offering evidence-based psychological therapies to people with mild to moderate depression and anxiety disorders, but it is also piloting the use of employment advisers in IAPT services to test the value of providing retention focussed employment advice and support within IAPT teams and to assess whether it reduces the number of people moving onto benefits.

Employment Advisers (EA) (*Box 1*), who are funded through the Department for Work and Pensions, are providing skills based interventions, information and practical support to help people receiving IAPT services to:

- Retain work
- Exchange current work for another more suitable job role
- Return to work following sickness absence
- Access work for the first time or after a substantial period out of work.

Critically, they can also facilitate a link between support services—such as Jobcentre Plus, Access to Work or Pathways to Work—and help them to improve their awareness of the issues facing customers and to signpost individuals to IAPT services with employment advisers. Although EA pilots are due to report later this year, some regions have really embraced the primary care mental health and employment agenda and invested significant resources to build extra capacity into the system. In London, Commissioning Support for London (CSL) has supported 27 PCTs with the commissioning modelling and service design of integrated IAPT Employment Services through an additional allocation process totalling almost £5million.

In addition to having employment advisory roles to work with individuals within IAPT services, some services are taking the next step and working directly with employers to target those, 'in work and struggling' as well as the long-term

unemployed. Two examples of this practice can be found in London where CSL's Working for Wellness programme has entered into an agreement with Royal Mail Group to link its workplaces with local IAPT services. By targeting the 'in work and struggling', services are reaching out to those who may wish to access treatment and hopefully prevent them from taking sick leave.

The Working for Wellness programme is keen to learn from the findings emerging from this pilot initiative and contribute to an evidence-base for future employer engagement initiatives.

Not only does the scheme offer self or GP referral for both Royal Mail Group staff and their families, a joint Working for Wellness and Royal Mail internal

Box 1. Service focus

IAPT Employment Advisers (EAs) work with employed people who are experiencing poor mental health for any reason. Clients may be experiencing stress, bullying, or not performing to the best of their ability due to depression or anxiety. Sometimes it is just one aspect of the role or one relationship with a particular colleague that is causing anxiety and distress. Once this is addressed, people feel more in control of their work situation, are able to put things into perspective, and are happier at work.

In Buckinghamshire, Kerri Parkins and Vicky Edmonds are providing specialised, objective, practical advice and guidance to support and enable people to retain their employment. They note: 'We talk through a client's situation with them, assess their difficulties, explore their options and help formulate their individual solution-focused plan of action. This enables them to return to work or stay working. Facilitating improved communication with employers is often the key to success and finding alternative work can also be a viable option for clients.'

'Our job retention services have a high success rate with 70–80% of clients remaining at work, returning to work or finding alternative employment.'

‘Clients may be experiencing stress, bullying, or not performing to the best of their ability due to depression or anxiety’

communications campaign, including the new website www.workingforwellness.org.uk, is promoting relevant information and the self-referral route to support. This campaign also includes focus groups and information sessions are delivered, to promote the availability of IAPT services, at an appropriate time and place for the employees of each identified site.

As well as working with those who are

currently employed, the Working for Wellness programme has joined forces with MITIE, the FTSE 250 strategic outsourcing and asset management company, to offer a vocational training scheme to unemployed clients of the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) service across London. The Vocational Training Scheme provides employability training and on-the-job work experience for up to sixteen weeks to a total of 10 candidates recruited from four London IAPT services.

As the work placement draws to an end, all candidates are guaranteed an interview with MITIE and are able to apply for any vacancies across the company.

Candidates' views and opinions are being sourced regularly as part of the evaluation process and help inform an evidence-base of



what can be achieved through interventions linking psychological therapy services with a large private sector employer. This will include asking each candidate to complete Generalised Anxiety Disorder Assessments (GAD7) and Patient Health Questionnaires (PHQ9) regularly to demonstrate whether meaningful employment can reduce anxiety and depression.

For more information about these initiatives above contact: Shaun Crowe, Commissioning Support for London. Email: Shaun.Crowe@csl.nhs.uk

References

- Oxford Economics (2007) *Mental Health and the UK Economy* March 2007. Oxford Economics, Oxford
- Waddell G, Burton AK (2006) *Is Work Good for Your Health and Well-being?* The Stationery Office, Norwich

Focusing on Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment

A key part of the National Mental Health Development Unit's wellbeing and population mental health programme will be the introduction and roll out of the Mental Well-being Impact Assessment (MWIA) development project. Building on the pioneering work in London, the North West and West Midlands over the last two years, the project will build a national profile for mental wellbeing impact assessment, strengthen capacity across the country in MWIA and link with Health Impact Assessment work in the regions.

MWIA uses a mixture of methods to assess the potential for a proposal, project, policy or service to impact on the mental wellbeing of a group, area or population. It helps to create evidence-based changes that will have a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing, and help address inequalities.

The MWIA process enables a shift in thinking and focus to improve mental wellbeing. It can contribute to realigning resources and models of service from those that concentrate on managing the consequences of poor mental well-being (high crime, unemployment, illness, intolerance, and underachievement) to ones that tackle

the determinants of good mental well-being: control, resilience, participation and inclusion.

A key milestone in the project will be the publication of the MWIA Toolkit later in the year and the project will be supporting its dissemination and application throughout England with a capacity-building programme.

Gregor Henderson, programme lead, comments: 'Given the economic pressures that the public sector is facing over the short and long term, prevention is a key enabler in bringing about more productive and cost effective services. We have to bring about new and innovative ways of thinking about old problems.'

'There is now compelling evidence around what factors determine and sustain good mental health and well-being for organisations, communities, families and individuals of all ages. This work pulls this evidence together in a unique and practical way, to enable organisations and communities to play a key role in bringing about measurable improvement in mental health and well-being at a local level.'

The work is relevant to those wishing to focus on wellbeing outcomes or integrate these

into other impact assessment approaches. The project leads are keen to build a network and to hear from practitioners using MWIA to meet local needs.

Contact lynn.snowden@inukshukconsultancy.com about the capacity building programme or forthcoming toolkit. Further information is available at www.nmhd.org.uk

News in brief

Three e-learning programmes are available to help educate GPs and primary care staff about the IAPT programme. They are now live online, free and ready to be accessed by primary care staff

Visit: <http://learning.bmj.com/learning> for The IAPT programme – e-learning module for Primary care staff and The side effects of psychotropic drugs – an IAPT e-learning module for Primary care staff

Visit: <http://elearning.rcgp.org.uk/> for the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies – e-learning module for GPs