

World Mental Health Day: what is the impact of mental health first aid in the workplace?

[Tuesday 10th October 2017] Academics at the University of Nottingham are marking World Mental Health Day by appealing for participants to take part in a study investigating the impact of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) in the workplace.

The international awareness day on October 10th, organised by the World Health Organisation and the World Federation for Mental Health, will this year feature the theme of 'mental health in the workplace' aiming to end the stigma of talking about mental health at work.

One in three UK adults of working-age are likely to experience a mental health issue, and employers are increasingly keen to support staff before this results in long-term sickness absence or so-called 'presenteeism', in which people attend work but their ability to function effectively becomes impaired.

Mental illness costs the UK economy between £70bn and £100bn a year and is the leading cause of sickness absence, with 15.8 million working days lost in 2016 alone. Increasing people's awareness of mental health, reducing stigma and promoting and improving access to support at an early stage are recognised strategies for improving and maintaining mental health in the workplace.

MHFA training teaches people to be able to spot the signs and symptoms of common mental health issues, provide support on a first aid basis, and guide a person to further support, be that an organisation's in-house counselling, EAP, self-help or professional services.

Many UK employers have funded members of their workforce to attend MHFA courses, with a large body of anecdotal evidence and staff surveys highlighting the training's benefits. However, there has currently been no academic evaluation of its impact on the mental health of the workforce who receive it.

A team of researchers in the University's School of Health Sciences, are aiming to address this gap through a 10-month study - Mental Health First Aid in the Workplace (MENTOR)

They are asking organisations that have funded at least one member of their workplace to attend Adult MHFA or Armed Forces MHFA training, delivered by MHFA England, to take part in an online survey to share their experiences. They are also keen to hear from instructors who deliver the training to help the academics reach out to organisations they have trained.

The study is funded by the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) through its Research Fund and is supported by MHFA England, which is promoting the survey to its database of organisations and asking its instructors to consider sharing information about the research with their clients.

Professor Avril Drummond who is leading the study, said: "Many of us spend a significant proportion of our lives in the workplace and for those who are facing problems with their mental health this can be extremely challenging.

“It’s really positive that employers are increasingly recognising the issue of mental health in the workplace and are looking at ways in which they can reduce stigma and support their staff through a tough time.

“The MENTOR study will provide evidence specific to workplace contexts, adding to the global body of evidence on MHFA.

The survey, which will be open until the end of the year, explores the types of MHFA training received by the organisation, and what has happened or may happen in the future as a result. The survey should take around 15 minutes to complete.

Each organisation taking part will be entered into a prize draw for a touchscreen tablet computer and the researchers will be recruiting up to 100 instructors willing to promote the survey, who will receive a £20 discount on training and/or materials from MHFA England.

Poppy Jaman, CEO MHFA England commented, “Anecdotally, we know that Mental Health First Aid training has a positive impact in changing workplace culture when it comes to mental health and wellbeing. Many organisations we work with also report that MHFA can help support referrals to employee assistance programmes and, in the long-term, address rising sickness absence as a result of mental ill health.”

“We are dedicated to continually evaluating and improving our courses through research, including through independent and self-run studies into the effectiveness of MHFA training. Based on a large body of studies, both qualitative and quantitative, we know that MHFA is a positive influence when it comes to improving attitudes and help-seeking behaviour, and we hope that by working with Professor Drummond’s team this will be further evidenced in workplace settings through the MENTOR study.”

More information about the study is available from the MENTOR study coordinator Dr Melanie Narayanasamy on 0115 823 0888 or by email melanie.narayanasamy@nottingham.ac.uk

—Ends—

More information is available from Dr Melanie Narayanasamy in the School of Health Sciences, University of Nottingham on +44 (0)115 823 0888, melanie.narayanasamy@nottingham.ac.uk; or Emma Thorne, Media Relations Manager for the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences in the Communications Office at The University of Nottingham, on +44 (0)115 951 5793, emma.thorne@nottingham.ac.uk

*Our academics can now be interviewed for broadcast via our Media Hub, which offers a Globelynx fixed camera and ISDN line facilities at University Park campus. For further information please contact a member of the Communications team on +44 (0)115 951 5798, email mediahub@nottingham.ac.uk or see **the Globelynx website** for how to register for this service.*

*For up to the minute media alerts, **follow us on Twitter***

The University of Nottingham

The University of Nottingham is a research-intensive university with a proud heritage, consistently ranked among the top one per cent in the world. Studying at the University of Nottingham is a life-changing experience and we pride ourselves on unlocking the potential of our 44,000 students — Nottingham was named University of the Year for Graduate Employment in the 2017 Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide, was awarded gold in the TEF 2017 and features in the top 20 of all three major UK rankings. We have a pioneering spirit, expressed in the vision of our founder Sir Jesse Boot, which has seen us lead the way in establishing campuses in China and Malaysia — part of a globally connected network of education, research and industrial engagement. We are ranked eighth for research power in the UK according to REF 2014. We have six beacons of research excellence helping to transform lives and change the world; we are also a major employer and industry partner — locally and globally.