

**2010 Conference Report Newsletter: January 2011**

**“I had a really great weekend – I shall definitely be coming back next year!”**

One of over 80 delegates, a first timer was very clear about how much she had enjoyed the UK National Work Stress Network 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference.

Conference Chair, **Dave Jones** of Riverside College and the Stress Network Steering Group, declared the 10<sup>th</sup> Conference open. Dave welcomed delegates and guests to what proved to be a highly successful weekend event. A full programme of speakers, workshops and networking time developed at the beautifully situated [Hillscourt Conference Centre](#) to the SW of Birmingham, midst the Lickey Hills, and home of NASUWT residential training and administrative centre.

A full detailed conference report is available at [www.workstress.net](http://www.workstress.net) – look for the specific links to the annual conference reports pages.

Photographs are included in this newsletter and more will be displayed along with the full report of conference at the 2010 page on the website.

The Saturday morning Plenary session was addressed by a panel of

speakers who also discussed questions from the floor at the close of session.

**Dr Colin Mackay**, HSE Researcher and Psychologist began by outlining some of the newer trends in stress related absence from work. He also looked briefly at duty of care and referred to the 2002



Hatton judgment which had set the bench mark for many further stress PI claim cases in the courts. Commenting on the Management of Safety Regulations, Colin referred to the issues of foreseeability, degrees of control over work and the matter of ‘reasonable practicability’. He spoke to the matter of ‘the burden of proof’, inspection and the duty to risk assess and set appropriate control measures in place HSE like all other public sector employers undergoing significant cuts in service which would have a serious impact on ability to deliver service.

Reference was made to the West Dorset NHS Trust which had failed to meet duties related to reported high levels of work stress and absence, culminating in the issuing of an Improvement Notice with targets established. Colin was able to give some time to questions before setting off on family business involving some distant travel in the cold and snowy conditions.

**Dianne Jones**, **Stockport College**, a founding member of the Network committee and former Treasurer was invited to outline the work at the college through its Mental Health at Work Project. Working alongside and through [Mindful Employers](#), many employers in the NW Region were taking the issue of work and mental health seriously. Dianne outlined how the College was developing local projects, providing TU training and developing new materials for TUC



publication. A new 'Mindful Unions' website is being developed through the TUC.

**Roger Nielsen, of Cheshire & Wirral NHS Trust Partnership** set out the scene of work with staff



side representatives and employees, in the pursuit of improved service, health and well-being across the Mental Health Trust, where staff were in constant contact with vulnerable persons, and exposed to increased vulnerabilities of their own.

The trust had signed up to Mindful Employers, implemented the HSE Stress Standards and was undertaking further reviews and setting up action planning to carry forward the previous outcomes and new developments. An



important 'Count me in' census of the workforce had enabled wider examination of the health and well-being issues of the Trust's staff.

Achievements included robust, effective dialogue with staff side, more Trusts signing up with the Mindful Employer Charter, cuts in staff stress levels and stress-related sickness absence, both in terms of monthly absence figures and length of time off in individual cases.

Conference moved on, after a refreshment break to hear from **John Usher, Employment Law Solicitor** [John Walker v Northumberland CC case 1995] and an **Accredited Mediator**.

John had facilitated a workshop in the 2009 conference which had proved to be very popular and useful. He was invited to share more thoughts on the mediation process with this year's conference.

The concluding speaker, **Ian Draper, Stress Network Convenor**, outlined some of the current issues related to the increasing levels of stress related illnesses and focused also on the shortcomings of an enforcement service that was already understaffed and facing massive cuts. He also drew attention to the effects of

*presenteeism at work* and its massive costs to the economy. Ian also outlined some of the work of the Network and thanked delegates for their continued support.

Following a short Q&A session, Conference moved on to lunch and then two Workshop Sessions filling Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning.

**Workshop Programme:-**

- + **Negative Behaviours and Bullying**
- + **Stress and the Law – an update on legal precedents and case-law**
- + **HSE Stress Management Standards and their application with respect to Organisational Change**
- + **Stress Risk Assessments**
- + **Post Trauma Stress**
- + **Dealing with Caseworkers' Stress – a TU and employer response discussion group**
- + **Stress and the Law – an update on legal precedents**
- + **Stress Sickness absence monitoring and return to work**

Selected comments from delegate feedback:-

- ✓ Legal workshop:-*This was the best I've ever attended anywhere!*
- ✓ Caseworkers' Stress:- *Excellent points to take away and raise back with my branch and employer*
- ✓ Risk Assessments:- *some really good insight into what should be happening*
- ✓ Sickness Absence:- *very thought provoking*

**Conference evaluation**

It is clear that delegates find the format of our weekend very much to their liking and it provides opportunities both for serious input, networking in very comfortable surroundings as well as opportunities to attend two different workshops, with the added benefit of some of the more popular topics being repeated. This latter point has helped to ensure that we get good attendance and has shown that we are hitting the right targets.

**Thanks**

We extend our very grateful thanks to our guest speakers and workshop facilitators, also of course to delegates for making the weekend a

success for themselves. Despite the inclement weather in other parts of the country we maintained a good attendance through until the very end session and Sunday lunchtime.

Once more Hillscourt Conference Centre facilities were very much appreciated by everyone and the staff did all they could to make our stay as successful as usual. We thank NASUWT for their continued support for the use of the centre for the weekend.

Particular thanks also go to Les Roberts, Conference Secretary and Network Treasurer for his excellent work in dealing with all bookings and reservations – without his unstinting support, we would not have such a smoothly run event.

FOR FULL CONFERENCE REPORT – SEE  
[WWW.WORKSTRESS.NET](http://WWW.WORKSTRESS.NET) AND VISIT  
“CONFERENCE 2010 PAGE”



### Stress Network News

For several years now, we have been most fortunate to have support from a number of Trade Unions in sponsoring our Information Pack booklet. It has been very generously printed by NASUWT at least three if not four times.

Other unions especially UNISON have been very helpful in supporting much of our work in many ways and we carry the logos of unions and organisations that support our work on the front cover of the current edition.

Stocks are pretty well now depleted and it is time once more for a further revision, updating and re-launch of the booklet, and to that end we are now venturing into new territory for the Network – we will be covering the full cost ourselves through sponsorships and support and from within our own funds.

The Steering Committee has undertaken the work of redrafting and indeed adding new sections and currently we have a small editorial team who will be finalising the text for publication sometime early in 2011. For the first time too we will be carrying advertisements within the booklet.

Once we have completed the work we hope to be able to launch the new copies at union national conference exhibitions which we are able to attend. Bulk copies will be available in due course by arrangement and upon agreement of costs.

We have found that the booklet has been one of the best pieces of information on Work-Stress that we have ever produced. Alongside our newsletters and the general website pages, it continues to generate a lot of interest and is highly popular, being of suitable size and design to take to consultative meetings, to leave on coffee tables and to draw attention to its content for all interested parties.

#### Diary Dates

##### Network Steering Group Meetings 2011

Jan 22nd, March 19<sup>th</sup> [TBC], 18<sup>th</sup> June; Sept 17<sup>th</sup>

All the above are held at Hillscourt Centre, Rednal 10.00 a.m. till 12.30 p.m. [Saturdays]

**Network Conference** – November 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> [TBC]

##### Hazards Campaign Meetings 2011

Usually last Thursday in Quarter and generally at Greater Manchester Hazards Centre, commencing 12.30 p.m. for light lunch

March 31st; June 30th; Sept 29th; Dec 15th

Please make a note of these dates in your diary.

### Work-Stress News

The following items of news have emerged in recent weeks and months, showing once more that Stress remains one of the highest causes of sickness absence from work. It is no respecter of position, of role, of age, nor of social background.

Stress remains a key cost to the economy and above all to the personal lives and well-being of many thousands of workers. Currently with this Government's determined onslaught of massive cuts to the Public Sector, incidences are seen to be rising daily, and there is little concern for the well-being of those affected by those in high public office.

Political dogma of the like not seen in this country for over 20 years will surely bring the nation's work-force to its knees?

## Jobless 'battle mental problems'

December 2010

Unemployment is causing heightened levels of mental health problems among young people, according to a report by the Prince's Trust charity.

Its survey of 2,170 people aged 16 to 25 revealed almost half had problems such as self-harm and insomnia.

Some 943,000 people aged 16 to 24 are unemployed in the UK. The BBC's Reeta Chakrabarti reports on:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-12087916>

## 21,000 Welsh teachers off with Stress related illness

December 2010

NUT Cymru says it is concerned about the number of teachers missing work because of stress

Tens of thousands of teaching days have been lost in Wales through teachers taking time off due to stress, new figures show.

Data supplied by two-thirds of Wales' councils showed 21,000 teaching days were lost for this reason last year.

The figures were released to BBC Wales through a Freedom of Information request.

The Welsh Assembly Government said action had been taken to reduce the amount of stress teachers faced.

More than 144,000 days were lost in total in Wales in the 2009 calendar year because of teachers being off work sick.

However, the number of sick days fell by 11,000 between 2008 and 2009 for the 16 of 22 Welsh counties which responded.

Provisional figures for 2010 also appeared to suggest the downward trend was continuing.

David Evans, Wales Secretary for National Union of Teachers Cymru, said he was pleased the overall figures for days off due to sickness had gone down, but was concerned about the number of days lost due to stress.

"We would like the authorities to look at why so many days are being lost through stress and what can be done about it", David Evans NUT Cymru commented.

He said: "It could be because of pupil behaviour, because of workload, it could be because of things such as pressure for results. There could be bullying and harassment issues or it could be because of inspections.

"Some of the days lost that are not put down to stress may be stress related in some way, but people don't necessarily want to put stress down as a reason.

"In the more enlightened times that we're in now, we would like to think people would specify the true reason they're off but we do find for people who've been off for a long period of time, it might be stress but called something else."

Mr Evans said while nothing could be done about people off sick with flu for example, stress could be tackled.

"We would like the authorities to look at why so many days are being lost through stress and what can be done about it," he said.

## Stress seriously affecting European workers?

December 2010

*A quarter of European employees suffer ill health caused by work*

Older people in manual roles, women undertaking work that is likely to impact on their health in the long term, and employees without fixed-term contracts are among the most vulnerable workers in Europe, new research has found.

The initial results of the fifth **European Working Conditions Survey** were revealed last month by the *European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions*, based on data collected from almost 44,000 workers active in 34 European countries in the first six months of this year.

Among the most interesting findings was the fact that a quarter of European workers feel that work is having an adverse effect on their health. However, 90 per cent said they are well-informed about the risks to their health and safety.

In terms of the types of risks faced, 63.5 per cent of workers said they are forced to perform repetitive hand or arm movements (an increase of 7.4 per cent in the last 10 years); 15.3 per

cent are exposed to hazardous substances; and 46 per cent are forced to adopt painful, or tiring positions for at least a quarter of their working time. And although exposure to vibration has decreased overall, among skilled manual workers it has actually shot up by 10 per cent over the last 10 years.

Asked if they would be able to continue doing their job after the age of 60, less than half of manual workers said yes, compared with 60 per cent of all workers. The effects of the economic crisis were also revealed by the survey, with 3 per cent more respondents than in the 2005 survey saying they feared for their jobs. This figure rose to 32 per cent among those without a fixed-term contract. Less than a third of workers said they would be able to find another job with a similar salary, should they lose their current job, and almost 40 per cent indicated that they had gone into work when they were sick in the 12 months preceding the survey. The director of the ETUI's health and safety department, Laurent Vogel, said the survey shows that the long-term impact of work on health may be more worrying than its immediate effects. He explained: "Women who predominantly work in jobs and sectors where the immediate consequences of work are less noticeable lose any advantage looked at over a full career. Women are also more tightly controlled at work: fewer women than men can take a break when they want, or have prospects for career advancement."

Mr Vogel also pointed out that with debates raging in several European countries – including the UK – on retirement age and employment of older workers, extending working life very much depends on the type of work involved. He said: "For the least-favoured groups, the build-up of poor working conditions over life often makes it a physical impossibility to keep working. The way things are, a building worker, cleaner, or call-centre worker will have difficulty keeping their job and their health after the age of 50 or 55.

"Adjustment schemes for older workers will not be enough given the build-up of ill health throughout working life."

He concluded: "Without a big improvement in working conditions and more control of them by

workers, delaying retirement is little better than a cynical ploy for cutting the pensions of those already on the lowers incomes. The current reforms could well simply widen income gaps at the expense of older workers who, faced with the threat of poverty, may have no other choice but to slog on in a health-destroying job."

A PDF of the preliminary results of the survey can be downloaded [here](#). **The full report of the fifth European Working Conditions Survey will be published in the new year.**

## Nearly ten per cent of police off sick or on limited duty

Almost one in 10 police officers in England and Wales is on sick leave or performing limited duties, according to new figures published today.

Almost 9,500 are on restricted duties due to ill-health, The Times reports. A further 2,000 are on long-term sick leave and have been off work for at least one month. The figures emerged in data obtained by The Times after it submitted Freedom of Information requests on each of the 43 police forces in England and Wales.

A Home Office spokesman said the responsibility for decisions about whether an officer retires on ill-health grounds or placed on restricted duties was a matter for the Chief Constable of the force concerned.

The spokesman said: "Restricted duties allows officers who are unable to undertake the full range of police duties to remain a police officer with restricted responsibilities rather than to be retired on grounds of ill-health.

"Recuperative duties are a temporary arrangement while officers recover from sick leave."

There are 1,902 officers on long-term sick leave in England and Wales, according to the figures.

These officers receive their full salary for the first six months and then half pay for the next six months, the newspaper found.

The Police Federation said that many of the 6,086 officers with long-term health problems on "restricted duties" should be allowed to retire.

Police Federation chairman Paul McKeever said: "The artificial cap on people being allowed to

retire due to ill-health - no more than six officers per thousand a year - was seemingly plucked out of thin air by the Home Office.

"To make an arbitrary decision and put an artificial cap on is ridiculous and ludicrous.

"It means that many officers who have no likelihood of returning to frontline duties are able to retire.

"Officers who have served their communities and, through no fault of their own, have become unable to perform their duties are being accused of swinging the lead and malingering."

Chief Constable Peter Fahy, Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) lead for workforce development, said: "Police chiefs want to be fair by those officers who have been injured on duty or who have suffered from stress-related problems due to the sort of incidents they deal with.

"However, during hard economic times, the number of officers on restricted duties is a real concern and we have asked the Home Office review to deal with this matter.

"Previously there was concern about the number of officers getting medical pensions and, as a result, officers have been kept in office positions. This cannot be a long-term solution."

The figures show that nearly one in seven police officers in Warwickshire is on sick leave or on restricted duties.

In Cambridgeshire there was one in 24. West Yorkshire Police has 465 officers on restricted duties.

The Metropolitan Police Service, the country's biggest police force, has 2,163 officers on restricted or recuperative duties and 300 on long-term sick leave.

A Scotland Yard spokesman said occupational health advisers were used to minimise the number of officers placed on limited duties or long-term sick leave.

"Despite the physically and mentally demanding nature of police work, absenteeism rates in the Met are low, ahead of most public sector organisations and other police services."

West Midlands Police, the country's second largest police force, has 149 officers who have

not worked for longer than a month and 560 on limited duties.

A spokeswoman for West Midlands Police said: "Given that we have around 9,000 officers, the number on long-term sick leave is relatively small."

## **Home working helps to drive commute times down to 10 year low**

The growth of home working has helped to cut average commute times to a 10 year low of 47 minutes and 48 seconds per day, a recent TUC analysis of official figures reveals.

Using figures from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), the TUC has calculated that £339 million worth of working time is spent travelling to and from work every day.

The TUC analysis - published to coincide with *Work Wise UK's Commute Smart* week (8-12 November) - finds that the average time spent commuting to and from work increased each year from 1998 to 2006, reaching a record 52 minutes and 36 seconds in 2006.

Since 2006, average commute times have decreased every year by 4 minutes and 48 seconds, falling to 47 minutes and 48 seconds per day in 2008 (the latest year that times are available), which is the lowest level since records began 10 years ago.

Between 2006 and 2008, the number of people working from home increased by 291,000 - accounting for more than half of employment growth during this period.

In 2008 alone, the increase in home working saved 232,000 commuting hours per day - precious time that will have alleviated road traffic and freed up seats on trains.

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said: 'After years of increasing journey times, it's great to see that the number of hours spent commuting to work is finally falling.

'UK employees already work some of the longest hours in Europe so it's doubly annoying to lose even more precious spare time stuck in traffic and packed on trains on the way to and from work.

'Our analysis shows that flexible and home working doesn't just benefit individuals and

their employers. If more people are allowed to work from home we can make the daily commute shorter and more pleasant for everyone.

'We know there is still plenty of untapped demand for flexible and home working. And with commutes still costing a staggering £337 million of working time every day, there's plenty more money and hours that can be saved by smarter working practices.'

Work Wise UK Chief Executive, Phil Flaxton said: 'Thousands of employers are already seeing the benefits to themselves and their staff by implementing a smarter working policy.'

'Policies such as staggering work journeys, home working, and encouraging cycling and walking, are enabling staff to get to work in a better way and in the process saving time and money whilst improving health and well-being.'

'Apart from business and transport benefits, there are also environmental impacts of reducing the need to travel. The average commuter driving an average car, covering the average commute distance will produce almost one tonne of CO2 per person per year.'

'With 25 million people in the UK commuting, that is the equivalent CO2 emissions that would fill almost 50 billion one litre water bottles every day, or enough to fill 89,000 typical three-bedroom homes, which is a city of some 200,000 inhabitants!'

'I urge all employers who receive flexibility requests to consider them seriously and do all they can to make flexible working a reality.'

## Job strain 'raises risk of heart problems in women'



*Stress can have a significant impact on health*

Women with high job strain have a 40% increased risk of cardiovascular disease

compared with those in less demanding posts, a US study suggests.

They have an 88% raised risk of a heart attack, and more chance of strokes and damage requiring coronary artery bypass surgery, researchers said.

Researchers from Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital followed 17,415 healthy women for more than 10 years. The study was presented to the American Heart Association.

Job strain, a form of psychological stress, is defined as having a demanding job that provides limited opportunity for decision making or to use one's creative or individual skills.

The researchers also found job insecurity was also associated with risk factors for cardiovascular disease, such as high blood pressure and obesity - but not directly with poor cardiovascular health.

Stress can trigger the release of hormones such as adrenalin and cortisol, which at persistently high levels are thought to damage the cardiovascular system.

It can also raise inflammation levels which are thought to destabilise the fatty plaques which build up in the blood vessels and can cause circulatory problems.

Experts are concerned that heart disease can be overlooked in women, as it is often mistakenly thought of as a male problem.

### Tips for reducing heart risk

- ✓ Take regular exercise
- ✓ Spend time with your family and friends
- ✓ Use relaxation techniques
- ✓ Try not to take work home

Women may have less common symptoms, such as back pain, burning in the chest, abdominal discomfort, nausea, or fatigue, which makes diagnosis more difficult.

They are also less likely to seek medical help, and tend to present late in the process of their disease.

Researcher Dr Michelle Albert said the study suggested job stress had both a short and long-term effect on cardiovascular health.

She also said it was crucial for employers to monitor job stress, and take action to try to alleviate it. "Job stress results in absenteeism, sickness, and disability, which can reduce productivity and competitiveness," she said.

Some critics believe it is not stress that causes heart problems - but the unhealthy behaviour, such as smoking and drinking, that some people adopt to try to cope with stress.

Ellen Mason, a senior cardiac nurse at the British Heart Foundation, said the exact mechanism by which stress could change the body's chemistry to raise the risk of heart disease had still to be pinned down. But she said there was a growing body of research to suggest that it did have a damaging effect on the lining of the arteries.

## Frontline Health Service damage

A recent UNISON survey - over a cross section of more than 8,000 NHS staff - reveals that hospitals are responding to financial difficulties by freezing recruitment, cutting posts and services, outsourcing and restructuring. Almost a third of staff say this has led to a decrease in the quality of patient care, 80% reported an increase in workload, while half were struggling with staff shortages.

Karen Jennings, UNISON Head of Health, said, "What is truly distressing is that the survey clearly shows how spending cuts are already threatening to damage the quality of patient care.

The Government are turning back the clock and dragging the country back to the dark days of the 80s and early 90s when the NHS was starved of money. Back then, patients who could afford it, paid up to avoid being at the end of a very long waiting list or being treated in poorly maintained hospitals.

"Government cuts threaten to undo and reverse the benefits of all the investment and hard work that has gone into turning the NHS round over the past 13 years. We have been able to train our own nurses instead of scouring third world countries to fill shortages. In a worrying reversal, half the people we surveyed are affected by staff shortages. This is particularly dangerous because the lack of staff was a key

factor in the appalling problems with patient care at Mid Staffs Hospital.

"Our survey also reveals that 80% of staff have seen their workload increase and that means fewer staff treating more patients. This ties in with reports that NHS organisations are implementing recruitment freezes and making redundancies across the UK.

"Our survey explodes the myth that the NHS is protected from spending cuts. How can this be true when Trusts are being asked to make savings to the tune of £20bn? At the same time, we know that the NHS faces an unquantifiable increase in demand as a result of cuts to local authority and other public sector services.

"The cost of treatments are going up, drugs are getting more expensive, we have an aging population who need more, not less care and the cost of the latest round of top-down reforms will run into billions. "It is time for the Government to think again about the long term damage that their plans are inflicting on the NHS."

## Are you feeling Happy?

The UK government is poised to start measuring people's psychological and environmental well-being, bidding to be among the first countries officially to monitor happiness.

Despite "nervousness" in Downing Street at the prospect of testing the national mood amid deep cuts and recent rioting in Westminster, the Office of National Statistics will shortly be asked to produce measures to implement David Cameron's long-stated ambition of gauging "general well-being".

Countries such as France and Canada are looking at similar initiatives as governments around the world come under pressure to put less store on conventional economic measures of prosperity such as gross domestic product.

British officials say there is still hesitation in some parts of Whitehall over going ahead with the programme during such difficult economic times, but Cameron is said to want to place the eventual results at the heart of future government policy-making.

*Smile, go on – you know it's good for you!*