

**WORK** stress

The UK National Work-stress Network • [workstress.net](http://workstress.net)

**Hazards  
Campaign**

**Newsletter** Spring 2011

## Including Conference 2011 details

### Sickness Absence System Review

The Government has launched a review into the sickness absence system, saying it wanted to tackle the "staggering" £100 billion cost to the economy every year.

The review will examine "radical" new ways of helping more people stay in work and reduce the cost of sickness to businesses as well as the wider economy. David Frost, director general of the British Chambers of Commerce, and Dame Carol Black, a government adviser on health, will lead the review, which will report later this year.

Ministers said that under the current system, employers had to bear the costs of short-term sickness, with taxpayers absorbing the cost of longer-term ill health. The Government said it was determined to end the "vicious cycle" of people being out of work then seeing their health deteriorate even further.

Employment Relations Minister Edward Davey said: "This is an important review which will help tackle the problems faced by business and individuals. Managing sickness absence more effectively will be a win-win situation for all - businesses, individuals, the taxpayer and crucially, the economy. It could improve productivity, boost growth and mean that many more people no longer have to rely on taxpayer handouts."

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said: "If this were to be a genuine attempt to support those on long-term sickness get back to work then the TUC would welcome it with open arms. However we are concerned that it will end up as just another part of the Government's cost-saving onslaught on the income and rights of those at work, and those on benefits. The fact that the review is being conducted by a leading voice of employers' interests, with no corresponding involvement from unions representing workers

affected by sickness absence, gives us little confidence in the outcome."

### Overwork: the 'kiss of death' for relationships?

The personal relationships of almost one in three people in the UK have suffered because of work pressures, according to a recent poll carried out by IOSH.

In the run-up to Valentine's Day, the Institute questioned 2000 people to explore how a poor work-life balance can drive a wedge between partners. Of the 29 per cent who said they had been in a relationship adversely affected by a poor work-life balance, the two main problems were long working hours and high workloads.

Dr Luise Vassie, executive director of policy at IOSH, said: "The struggle to achieve a good work-life balance is an ever-growing issue in today's society. It seems that too many of us are letting work take hold of our lives – and our home life is often suffering as a result.

Of course, people are working harder than ever, but as our results show, too many are seeing their relationships outside of work suffer as a consequence. And this isn't solely a problem for the employee; an unhappy worker is often an unproductive one.

Overall, some 60 per cent of survey respondents said their work-life balance was either very poor, poor, or could be better. Just 16 per cent said their employer had a well-being programme in place."

Prof Cary Cooper, an expert in the field of working-life quality, said: "IOSH's poll ties in with the fact that the UK has the longest working hours in Europe. One of the main issues that lead to a poor work-life balance is bad management. There are managers out there who create a culture

where people feel they cannot leave – they have to come early or stay late.

Employers need to be open to flexible working hours to allow home-life and work-life to have a healthy balance. Saying that, it's also down to the individual to make sure they organise their lives well and manage their workloads, avoiding working long hours.

"If people are experiencing a poor work-life balance they are not investing time with their partner, spouse, kids, friends or even families – and that is what causes a breakdown in these relationships."

### **SOS for social work stress and trauma**

UNISON, the UK's largest union, recently highlighted that stress amongst social workers had reached chronic proportions, and called for better support systems to help them deal with traumatic cases. The union said that members were increasingly getting in touch to say that they were struggling to cope as staffing and services are cut, while more and more people in their communities need help.

Helga Pile, UNISON national officer for social work, said: "Workloads have spiralled out of control, and staffing levels in social work departments are woefully inadequate. Bureaucracy is still a huge burden, and a jump in referrals post baby Peter, continues to pile on the pressure. Child protection cases are ever more complex, and we are also seeing many more adult safeguarding cases coming through.

"The clear message from our members in social work is that stress rates are high and climbing. The toll this takes on social workers' health and on their family life is huge. When social workers are forced to take time off for stress-related illness they are often thrown straight back in when they return. Employers could save millions and give social work departments a huge boost by getting to grips with the underlying causes of stress and depression.

Counselling should be made available to any social worker who needs it, for as long as they need it. Proper support plans need to be there to ease the way back when people return to the front-line. Councils and Trusts need to develop pro-active strategies to tackle the burn-out that is driving social workers out of the profession."

The union has written to key stakeholders in social work highlighting the fact that social workers need more support to deal with stress and traumatic cases.

The Health and Safety Executive estimate that in 2009/10, an estimated 9.8 million working days were lost through work-related stress. On average, each person suffering from work-related stress took an estimated 22.6 days off in 2009/10. HSE figures show that social work and health is the sector with the second highest prevalence of stress-related illness across the whole economy.

### **Managing mental health at work**

An online search for "workplace stress" returns an indigestible 1.5 million results, so whether you are suffering from it or managing it, there is an almost inexhaustible array of resources at your disposal.

But stress is just one area of mental health, and, for employers, the challenges of dealing with this issue and making sure that all legal obligations are satisfied has got more difficult following changes to the definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010. Employers are now, more than ever, required to put in place adequate procedures and allowances for dealing with mental health in the workplace.

The move to push mental health higher up the business agenda has been gathering pace over the last few years. Employment lawyer Christopher Syder, partner at Davis Arnold Cooper, says: "Without doubt employers need to be on their guard because the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 originally provided that a mental illness would only qualify if it was 'clinically well-recognised'. However, this requirement was removed by section 18 of the DDA 2005, and does not appear in the Equality Act 2010."

Nick Bason, director of policy and communications at the Employers' Forum on Disability, says: "I think one of the issues is that mental health is less understood than physical impairment. There is often a lack of understanding of mental health issues plus an assumption that it can be immediately very serious."

While Bason agrees that HR managers have a legal duty to make sure that they do not discriminate against people with mental health

issues, he believes there is a wider social and moral responsibility, even within the workplace.

"Eating disorders and alcoholism are not covered by the Equality Act," he points out, "but often linked to symptoms of things that are covered. But I don't think that employers should get too hung up about what is and isn't covered - it's about doing the right things for your staff."

If one of the obvious benefits of having a robust mental health policy in place is avoiding legal risk, there are many other advantages.

"It also sends a message to staff that the employer cares and will treat people fairly," continues Bason, "and this is just as important for non-disabled employees to see. It furthers the reputation of the company and therefore gives it a competitive edge and by doing so, helps attract and retain the best staff."

There are, though, practical steps that employers need to make to ensure that they are carrying out their mental health duties.

"Employers should also carry out a risk assessment to ensure they are not exposing employees to unnecessary stress. As part of this, it may be desirable to educate managers to spot potential problems earlier to ensure employees receive the right support but also to ensure they are aware of what action to take in seeking advice."

And although, under the Equality Act, employers cannot ask employees about the state of their health - mental or otherwise - a lot of the day-to-day management of issues comes down to simply being a good manager.

So it's important, Bason believes, for companies to train managers. "The skills involved in being a good manager of mental health issues are the same skills as being a good manager across the board."

### **Government must create jobs, not blame sick and disabled for being out of work**

Commenting on findings from the government's incapacity benefit reassessment programme published in February by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said:

'While we welcome the government's commitment to implement the Harrington Review to improve the operation of work capability assessments, these trials were carried out under the old system where 40 per cent of appeals were upheld, due to problems the government acknowledges still exist.

'Even among those who do not appeal, many of the people judged as 'fit for work' in these trials are disabled, and will face additional barriers moving into the jobs market - particularly as they are likely to have spent a long period out of work and live in areas where unemployment is high.

'With more than five unemployed people now chasing every job vacancy, whether or not people get back into work will depend upon the economy starting to grow

'Instead of blaming sick and disabled people for being out of work the government needs to stop cutting back on support for unemployed people and start focusing on creating jobs.'

### **Bosses hit the bottle**

People in managerial jobs drink more than their counterparts in manual jobs, official statistics show. The annual Lifestyle Survey, published by the Office for National Statistics, reflects the habits of UK adults in 2009.

Average weekly alcohol consumption for managers was 13.5 units, compared with 10.7 units in those in manual jobs. The survey also showed that the number of alcohol-related deaths has fallen slightly.

The current recommendations for daily alcohol intake are that it should not regularly exceed three to four units for men and two to three units for women. However, the survey reveals that amongst managers, 41% of men and 35% of women exceeded these recommendations, on at least one day in the week before they took part in the survey.

When people were asked about heavy drinking - defined as more than eight units for men and more than six for women - 23% of men and 15% of women in managerial households had reached those levels of drinking on at least one day in the week before the survey. Amongst manual workers, the figures were 19% of men and 11% of women.

Chris Sorek, Chief Executive of the charity Drinkaware said heavy drinking among

professionals was a cultural problem. "While there continues to be a strong culture of drinking as part of professional roles it's not surprising to see managers drinking more than manual workers. Meetings and get-togethers are all situations where professionals may feel under pressure to drink. We also know many de-stress with a drink at home after a long working day."

The number of alcohol-related deaths in the UK has increased since the early 1990s, rising from 4,023 in 1992 to the 9,031 in 2008. However in 2009 the number of deaths fell slightly to 8,664. Overall though, the number of deaths is still up 26% on a decade ago.

### Move for Health!

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy says that employers can help prevent sickness absence by encouraging staff to be more active in the workplace and adopt healthier habits. The advice follows a survey the CSP carried out among some 2600 adults last year, which found that 25 per cent of employees regularly work through the day without taking a break, while 46 per cent reported physical pain due to working in the same position for a long time.

Consequently, the Society is using its 'Move for Health' campaign to call on employers and the government to recognise the value of occupational physiotherapy in the fight against work-related ill health.

Chartered physiotherapist Clare Claridge explained: "Exercise is an excellent way to improve your health and help your state of mind. There is nothing worse than being cooped up in an office behind a desk all day for your mental and physical well-being.

"That's why physios want employers to continue reminding their staff of the need to take breaks during their working day, get out of the office, take some exercise, and talk to their colleagues or manager if they are feeling under excess pressure. Taking regular exercise is great because it helps to relieve the pressure, allowing you to get some breathing space, which will ensure you can perform well when you get back."

The Society has produced a number of free leaflets designed to help employers keep their staff healthy. To download 'Fit for work', 'Fitness profits', and 'Sickness costs' visit [www.csp.org.uk/moveforhealth](http://www.csp.org.uk/moveforhealth)

### NHS sick leave 'higher in deprived areas'

More NHS staff take sick leave in areas of high deprivation in England, Audit Commission figures suggest.

The report looked at data collected between July 2009 and June 2010. It also found junior staff were more likely to take time off than senior colleagues: healthcare assistants had the highest average absence rate, followed by ambulance staff.

There are wide variations around the country when it comes to NHS sickness absence, with some organisations having a rate of 1.6% and others reporting 6.8%. Healthcare assistants have the highest average rate of absence taking off 6.5% of their working time, followed by ambulance staff at 6.3%, and nurses, midwives and health visitors at 5.2%.

Overall, the North East has the highest sickness rate on average, with the lowest seen in London..

Staff sickness absence in the NHS is estimated to cost £1.7bn a year, and is higher than in the private sector.

Deprivation and staff pay grade account for 61% of the variation in hospital trust absence and 38% in primary care trusts (PCTs), according to the study. Experts are unclear exactly why deprivation and pay scale influence absence rates so much, although "morale and ability to control one's work" may play a role for those who are lower paid.

Professor Dame Carol Black, national director for health and work, said the findings would "prompt reflection".

Paramedic Jonathan Fox, spokesman for the Association of Professional Ambulance Personnel, said he was unsurprised ambulance personnel had among the highest rates for sickness leave and was critical of the "unsustainable demand" being put on people. Increasing 999 calls, response times and individual performance targets had all conspired to put unprecedented pressure on ambulance staff.

"And when they are ill there is a tacit pressure on staff to stay at work. People are being coerced to stay to work because they are put on monitored attendance. People are forgetting that their most precious asset is their frontline people, who are

human beings. They are being pushed and pushed."

A spokesperson for the Department of Health said: "A healthier NHS is a more productive NHS and NHS organisations should do all they can to make sure their staff are in the best possible health."

### **BBC staff go sick 25yrs with stress**

BBC staff have taken a quarter of a century off sick in the past year - with stress. Working days lost added up to 25 years as depression and anxiety among employees soared by three-quarters.

Figures show 211 staff buckled under the pressure - and were absent for a grand total of 9,028 days. Last night insiders blamed the stress epidemic on job fears as the BBC battles to slash costs under Director-General Mark Thompson. One said: "People feel under siege. They are constantly looking at ways to escape the axe."

The BBC insisted: "Only 0.2 per cent of days were recorded as lost due to stress."

### **How worn-out Britain finally woke up to its chronic sleep problem**

Are we becoming a nation of insomniacs? Are we in the midst of an epidemic of sleep disorders, caused by stress at work (or by the lack of work), soaring anxiety levels and the pressures of a 24/7 lifestyle? It would seem so, judging by a survey of more than 6,000 British adults, in a report published in January by the Mental Health Foundation charity. It found that nearly two-thirds have problems getting a good night's sleep while about one in three may suffer from chronic insomnia, affecting mental and physical health, mood, energy, concentration levels, relationships and day to day functioning.

So why is sleep so crucial? In humans, its main purpose is to allow the brain – in particular, the cortex, the region that plays a key role in memory, perception and thought – to recover and regenerate, enabling us to learn and function during the day. In most people, sleep is regulated by the circadian rhythm, the internal biological clock that responds to light and darkness, so that (hopefully) we sleep at night and are awake during the day. This explains why for many people

shift work is a problem and is thought to be linked to a greater risk of cancer and heart disease.

Initially, sleep problems are usually triggered by an external, stressful event such as illness, bereavement or redundancy. But while most people can repay the "sleep debt" caused by sleepless nights and eventually get back to normal, in some people insomnia becomes entrenched, continuing even when the initial stress has disappeared or been resolved.

"One advantage of a daytime job is that it helps our bodies stay synchronised to the 24-hour clock. Without the need to get up for a job or go to bed, our biological clock can become weaker."

There is now good evidence that CBT (which is also used for problems such as phobias, depression and anxiety disorders) can work for insomnia, with 70% of sufferers showing some improvement; but availability is a "postcode lottery", says Dr Andrew McCulloch, chief executive of the Mental Health Foundation. The charity is campaigning for improved access to CBT for insomnia.

Above all, say sleep experts in all fields, a public health strategy to help prevent sleep problems is urgently needed, on a par with campaigns for healthy eating, exercise, alcohol and smoking.

### **Workplace stress worsens, unions warn**

Stress levels in the workplace have deteriorated in the last year, according to a new survey by the Trade Union Coordinating Group (TUCG).

In advance of this year's campaign action on health and safety, the TUCG, which brings together ten national unions, surveyed workers to find out which out of a number of stress indicators were being felt by workers, whether it was felt that these factors had aggravated over the last year, and whether these factors were causing stress.

The poll, which was carried out by Electoral Reform Research, surveyed more than 750 working adults and found that more than one in four workers are more stressed now than a year ago. About 20 per cent of workers report having to work harder as a result of job cuts in their workplace, with one in seven in fear of losing their jobs.

Mark Serwotka, general secretary of TUCG member, the Public and Commercial Services

(PCS) union, said: "This survey reveals the rising levels of stress and insecurity in the workplace. With government plans for further cuts to jobs, pensions and pay on the horizon, this situation is only going to deteriorate in the next 12 months."

Bob Crow, general secretary of co-union member, the RMT, suggested that a "culture of fear is sweeping through workplaces" with employees threatened with dismissal if they refuse to work longer hours for less money.

He added: "Bullying and harassment is rife and the first thing to take the hit is safe working practices, as the ConDem cuts agenda threatens to turn the tide on gains on worker's rights and workplace safety that have been secured since the Second World War."

### **And Finally.....Carlisle council staff told to clock-out for non-work chat!**

Council staff in Carlisle have been told to clock-out if they want to talk about the weather, holidays or babies. An e-mail sent to 31 workers by two team leaders in the city's benefits department, also warned staff not to treat work like a "holiday camp".

The e-mail reads: "In order to ensure maximum output is produced, the working ethos within the office will need to change. Staff should be aware of the reason why they are here, which is to work and not to treat the office as a day-to-day holiday camp. It is not a requirement for you not to talk to your fellow colleagues, but you should ensure that non-work conversations are kept to a minimum."

The email also states that if workers want to hold conversations about the weather, babies or holidays - they should clock out.

GMB Union representative, Ged Craig said the message was "ridiculous and a disgrace. It is suggesting that if, for example, you are standing in a queue for the photocopier having a chat you should clock out."

The email goes on to say that the way staff previously worked could not be sustained in the "current economic climate".

Dr Jason Gooding, Carlisle City Council's deputy chief executive, said the matter was an "isolated incident" and lessons would be learned. He said: "On this occasion the approach to managing staff

has fallen a little short of the high standards the city council has rightly come to expect of its team leaders and managers.

"This is an isolated incident and does not reflect the management style we are working hard to develop at the city council."

### **Stress Network proudly announces its new revised publication available from April 1st 2011**

The first copies of our completely revised and updated booklet will be on display at UNISON Health Sector Conference in Liverpool early in April.

Copies will also be available at NASUWT and NUT Annual conference over Easter weekend.

We are grateful to the sponsors who have spurred this revision.

[A downloadable version will be posted on the website very soon.](#)





## Annual Stress Network Conference 2011

### From Recession to Depression?

Hillscourt Conference Centre, Rednal, Nr Birmingham B45 8RS

Courtesy of NASUWT

**Saturday, November 26<sup>th</sup> 9.45 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. and  
Sunday, November 27<sup>th</sup> 9.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. 2011**

*This conference is aimed at Health & Safety Representatives, Health & Safety and Human Resources Specialists, Stress Management Consultants and Trades Union Shop Stewards*

#### **Government financial policy leading to job uncertainties and damage to well-being?**

The nation's workforce is very much under threat, with rising inflation, increased job insecurity and constant vilification by media and ill-advised politicians. There are increased stress levels especially in the public and voluntary sectors. Taxation, travel costs, weekly budgets, pay levels, pension contributions and more all create greater uncertainties for workers and raise stress levels.

Work has an important role in promoting mental wellbeing. It is an important determinant of self-esteem and identity. It can provide a sense of fulfillment and opportunities for social interaction. Work can also have negative effects on mental health, particularly in the form of stress.

A sense of injustice and unfairness arising from management processes or personal relationships can increase stress levels and risks to mental health. Stressful conditions in many workplaces include physical factors such as material hazards, noise, dust and dirt.

This conference will address through plenary and workshop sessions the issues that relate to good personnel management, effective workload control and the overall well-being and mental health of the workforce.

**Employers, Directors, and Managers at all levels as well as workers themselves have a duty of care not to create high levels of stress. The perceived need to cut the national deficit is not an acceptable excuse to create stress related ill-health for the workforce.**

**Failure to prevent a high-stress climate in the workplace should lead to enforcement and prosecution. Prevention is central to success. Cures are too late and ineffective.**

#### **PROGRAMME OUTLINE**

##### **SATURDAY MORNING – panel of speakers with Q&A session to follow**

- Prof Tarani Chandola, Manchester University confirmed
- West Midlands MIND - invited
- Dr Iain Burnside, Clinical Psychologist, Wakefield Pinderfield Hospital confirmed
- Rachael Maskell, UNITE Official, Voluntary Sector confirmed
- CIPD – invited
- John McDonnell MP – invited
- Stress Network speaker

##### **SATURDAY AFTERNOON & SUNDAY MORNING**

Two discreet Workshop sessions [each of 2 hours] guiding Representatives in supporting members; gathering evidence of Stress; dealing with casework and the stress factors facing TU Stewards; risk assessments and the pursuit of good management practices and commitment through workable in-house Stress Policy; bullying and negative behaviours - *full details to be finalised in due course.*

*With an overnight stay in pleasant, comfortable rural surroundings to the SW of Birmingham, it is hoped that this weekend event will provide a wide range of networking opportunities for delegates.*

**Don't delay – Book NOW to avoid disappointment and get the benefit of discounted delegate fees.**

**FINAL CLOSING DATE 31<sup>ST</sup> October 2011**

## UK National Work-Stress Network Newsletter

PLEASE COMPLETE A SEPARATE FORM FOR EACH DELEGATE AND STAPLE TOGETHER IF NECESSARY.  
PHOTOCOPIES ARE ACCEPTABLE.  
**PLEASE TYPE OR WRITE VERY CLEARLY**

NAME (BLOCK CAPITALS)			
CONTACT ADDRESS (BLOCK CAPITALS)			
	Postcode		
TELEPHONE No			MOBILE No
EMAIL <b>Block Caps please</b>			
ORGANISATION/UNION			
SPECIAL NEEDS (Use separate sheet if necessary)	Dietary		
	Access etc		
<b>DAY DELEGATE (per person)</b>			
One day (Sat):	<b>£110.00</b> (Unwaged delegate or non delegate carer: £60)* (For B&B on Friday add £50 to above prices)		£
Two days (Sat & Sun):	<b>£130.00</b> (Unwaged delegate or non-delegate carer: £70) * (Fee includes buffet lunch plus coffees on Saturday and coffees and packed lunch on Sunday)		
<b>RESIDENTIAL DELEGATE (per person)</b>			
Two days (including Sat B&B):	<b>£210</b> (Unwaged delegate or non-delegate carer: £90)* <b>TWO DAYS (INCLUDING FRIDAY &amp; SATURDAY B&amp;B):</b> <b>£270</b> (UNWAGED DELEGATE OR NON-DELEGATE CARER: £140)* (Fee includes bed & breakfast as booked plus coffees etc, lunch and dinner on Saturday and coffee and packed lunch on Sunday)		£
* Please note that there are no twin/double ground floor rooms in the Conference Centre. Delegates with mobility difficulties who need to share a room with a carer will be accommodated for bed and breakfast in a nearby Premier Inn (3 miles away) at an additional cost of £15 per person per night and possibly involving £7 taxi fares each-way.			£
<b>Please write total supplement here:</b>			
<b>SUB TOTAL</b>			£
Less Early Bird discount of 10% (Applies only to bookings and full payment received by 20 <sup>th</sup> September 2011.)			- £
<b>FULL TOTAL</b>			<b>£</b>

Complete this section if you wish to share a room			
Name of person with whom you are sharing.			
Type of room (✓)	TWIN	DOUBLE	
Is this person a delegate? (✓)	YES	NO	
Is this person a designated Carer? (✓)	YES	NO	

**CANCELLATIONS POLICY:** UP TO AND INCLUDING THE EARLY BIRD DISCOUNT CLOSING DATE, FULL REFUNDS [LESS AN ADMINISTRATIVE FEE OF £10] MAY BE MADE. AFTER THAT DATE A 75% REFUND ONLY MAY BE MADE UNLESS A CANCELLED PLACE IS FULLY FILLED BY ANOTHER NEW OR SUBSTITUTE APPLICATION.

**NO REFUNDS WILL BE MADE ONCE NUMBERS ARE CONFIRMED WITH CONFERENCE CENTRE  
BY OCTOBER 31<sup>ST</sup>**

COMPLETED APPLICATION FORMS SHOULD BE SENT TOGETHER WITH CHEQUE(S)  
PAYABLE TO **UK NATIONAL WORK-STRESS NETWORK** TO:-  
LES ROBERTS, CONFERENCE SECRETARY, 33 OLD STREET, UPTON UPON SEVERN, WORCS, WR8 0HN  
EMAIL ADDRESS: [UKWORKSTRESS@LIVE.CO.UK](mailto:UKWORKSTRESS@LIVE.CO.UK)