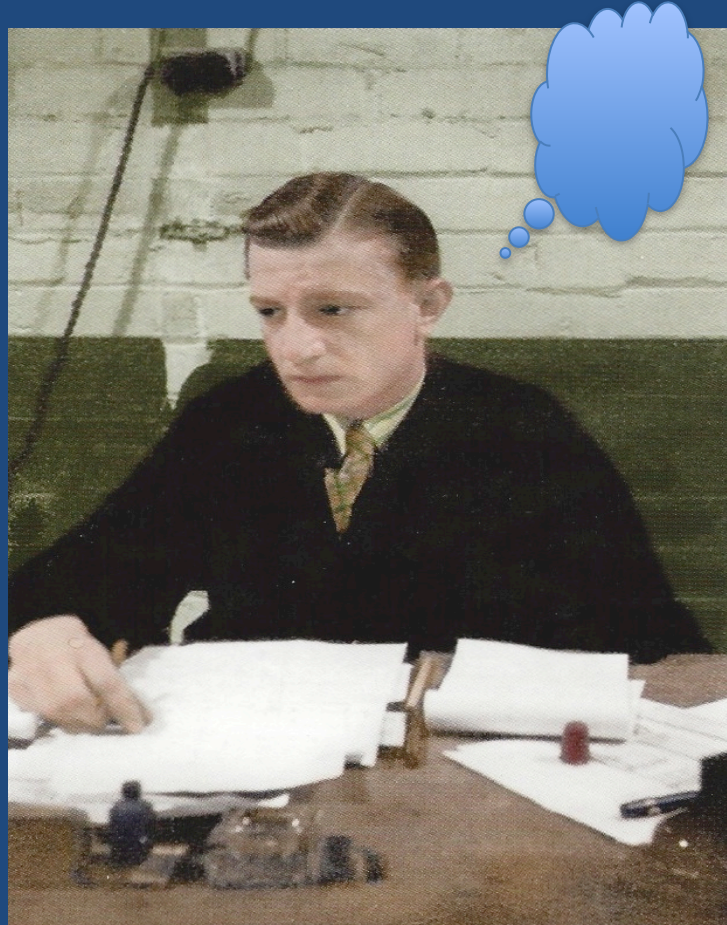# A Bit of a Do: Mental Health and the Workplace

Prof. Anne Harriss

Emeritus Professor

London South Bank University

Bad news at the team meeting: Bill resigned yesterday – the third to go this month, they aren't replacing them – we are a small team we can't manage the workload as it is.

Our boss just told us to talk to Bob -our new mental health first aider. So what can he do? Stress levels are sky high already.

He said he was 'devastated' to be shutting down most of his eateries, including Jamie's Italian, Barbecoa and Fifteen.

Shocked staff told of their anger and despair after being sent emails yesterday morning telling them not to bother turning up for work just 30 minutes before the company's official announcement.

One employee, who asked not be named, said: 'Email is a pretty cold way to sack your staff. Jamie won't be the one looking for a job and struggling to pay his bills, it'll be poor saps like us who worked for him.'

Another worker, chef Colin Roberts, 31, from Walsall, said: 'Speculation was rife that something was up but when we were told that the company had gone into administration and we'd lost our jobs it was a huge shock.

'A lot of staff were in tears.'

Earlier this year, dad-of-five Oliver, 3 – married to ools, 44 – bought £6million Essex mansion. It came after he closed 12 of his 37 UK restaurants. Yesterday, KPMG released a list of another 22 to shut. They include 20 Jamie's Italian branches – seven of them in London. His Barbecoa and Fifteen restaurants in the capital will also shut. As many as 1,300 jobs could go.

Three Jamie's Italian restaurants at Gatwick airport in West Sussex will remain open for now. The Fifteen restaurant in Newquay,

Shock: Staff outside Oliver's Italian in London's Piccadilly yesterday GAVIN RODGERS

Oliver's 1,000 staff left simmering at 'sacking by email'

Mental Health in the UK

- **526,000** UK workers were affected by work-related stress, anxiety or depression during 2016/2017

  (Health and Safety Executive, 2017)

  – **Loss of 12.5 million working days** due to mental ill-health

  (Health and Safety Executive, 2017)

  – Stress: one of the main concerns raised by half of public sector workers

  (Black and Frost, 2011)

Is work good for your health and wellbeing?
[Waddell and Burton (2006)]

- Work central to our identity

- Acknowledge physical and psychosocial aspects of work can pose a risk to health

  But

- Employment better for health than unemployment

- Employment and socio-economic status are the main drivers of inequalities of health

- Mental and physical health improvements result from a move into work and off social security benefits

- High job demand
- Low job control
- Ineffective management
- Workplace bullying and harassment
- Specific, high risk roles
  - those working in child protection –including social services and police – investigation of child sex abuse or indecent child images.

Mental health – currently high profile

- Stress related absences have overtaken musculo-skeletal disorder related absences

- Mental health awareness week (May 2019) – BBC featured high profile personalities: Nadiya Hussain and Prince William

- The need for risk assessments (HSE stress standards a good place to start) and policy development

- Is provision of mental health first aiders the answer?
  No -just one slice of a large cake

.The *job done* approach of providing workplace mental health first-aiders without addressing causative organisational factors is the equivalent of …..

……. providing "general" first aiders and large quantities of dressing materials to dress the bleeding stumps of amputated fingers. A more effective approach would be to replace the broken machine guarding that underpinned the accidents causing the injuries.

To promote workplace mental health employers should:

- **Risk assess** – Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999) and Health and Safety at Work etc Act (1974).

- **Recognise and manage** **any** potential impacts on mental health and wellbeing

- **Support employees** with, or recovering from, mental health difficulties

- **Make adjustments** designed to support people with mental health difficulties to thrive and make a positive contribution at work (CIPD, 2018).

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development highlight that of stressed workers:

- **37%** are more likely to experience conflict with colleagues
- **50%** are likely to become impatient with colleagues/customers/clients.
- **57%** find it harder to juggle multiple tasks
- **62%** take longer to complete tasks
- **80%** find it difficult to concentrate

 stress is a major cause of long-term absence in both manual and non-manual workers.

HSE Stress Management Standards consider

Job demands: work load, pattern and working environment

Control: amount of influence on work

Support: encouragement, sponsorship and resources

Relationships: positive working, avoiding conflict, deal with unacceptable behaviour

Role: understand and avoid conflict

Change: incorporate communication and involvement in the management of change

High-strain jobs

- Demanding and/or complex jobs

- Working to tight deadlines

- The employee has little "job control"

Management strategies

- **Primary** interventions

- **Secondary** interventions

- **Tertiary** interventions

Primary Interventions

- **Target specific causes:**
 - **P**revent/reduce those stressors that are potentially avoidable

Secondary interventions

- Positively influence the psychosocial environment
- Provide specific training for jobs particularly for those which are inherently stressful
- Train supervisors and managers to manage effectively and able to identify those who may have mental health issues
- Facilitate effective return to work programmes following periods of "longer-term" sickness absence

17

Tertiary interventions

- **Treatment (**the band-aid)– Includes talking therapies (eg CBT or counselling) for those suffering the severe effects of stressors.

- Focus on individuals, their behaviours and coping mechanisms

- Manage return to work following sickness absence

Stress and mental health
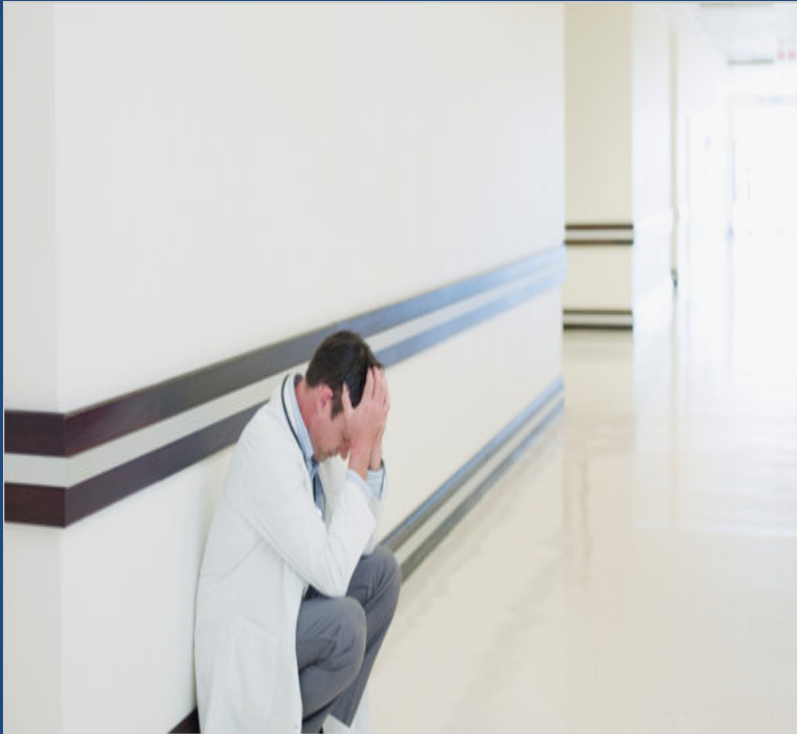
Stress and burnout in health care professionals

SOM (2018) What could make a difference to the mental health of UK doctors?
A review of the research evidence.

Home working
Juggling work and family responsibilities – child/elder care or both

Taylor (2017) Good Work: The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices

"... employers have a major role to play in improving outcome for workers through good **workplace practice**.... work should provide us all with the opportunity to **fulfill our own needs** and potential in ways that suit our situation throughout our lives."

Chartered Institute Personnel Development (CIPD)
submission to the Taylor review

Workplace stressors

- High job demands, poor job control, role ambiguity

- Public interface with aggressive customers

- Unsupportive and/or ineffective managers

- Poorly managed organisational change

- Poor workplace relationships

- Bullying and harassment

- Discrimination

The effect of a poor workplace culture

Psychological (and physical) trauma – high risk roles

- Some occupations have a higher risk of exposure to psychological trauma including:
  - Emergency services
  - Health care
  - The military
  - Money handling – banks/post offices/petrol stations

Toxic organisations

- Destructive behaviours

- Conflict commonplace

- Litigation increases – Employment tribunals

Further reading

- Waddell, G. and Burton, A.K. (2006) Is work good for your health and well-being?
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available from:
http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/
accessed 19 March 2019

Thank you for listening
any questions?