NICE Update

NICE public health guidance

Amanda Killoran, Patti White
Centre for Public Health Excellence, NICE, London, UK
Address correspondence to Amanda Killoran, E-mail: amanda.killoran@nice.org.uk

What's new?

Promoting mental wellbeing at work

The following public health guidance was published in November 2009: Promoting mental wellbeing through productive and healthy working condition (http://guidance.nice.org.uk/PH22).

This guidance is for all employers, employees and their representatives, irrespective of the size of the business or organization across public, private and voluntary sectors.

It supports implementation of the National Mental Health and Employment Strategy (2009). The Boorman report (2009) states that all NHS trusts should implement the NICE guidance on promoting mental health and wellbeing at work.

The guidance focuses on the role of the workplace as an organizational system that has inherent benefits for the mental health of employees. It uses the following definition of mental wellbeing:

Mental wellbeing is a dynamic state in which the individual is able to develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others and contribute to their community. It is enhanced when an individual is able to fulfill their personal and social goals and achieve a sense of purpose in society.¹

The review approach for this guidance was based on the use of conceptual modelling of a healthy organization, and appraisal and thematic analysis of a range of different types of evidence. There is very limited evidence of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of different types of work and working conditions that can enhance mental wellbeing of employees. However a number of observational studies including, for example, the Whitehall II study, have identified a number of work stressors that impact on psychological wellbeing. The Public Health Intervention Advisory Committee was also able to draw on other major reviews in formulating its recommendations, including the Foresight Report on Mental Capital and Wellbeing.¹

Recommendations for employers are concerned with the adoption of an organization-wide approach to promoting mental wellbeing. This means that employers should:

- Integrate the promotion of mental wellbeing into all policies and practices concerned with managing people, including those related to employment rights and working conditions.
- Create an awareness and understanding of mental wellbeing and reduce the potential for discrimination and stigma related to mental health problems.
- Ensure systems are in place for assessing and monitoring the mental wellbeing of employees so that areas for improvement can be identified and risks caused by work and working conditions addressed.
- If reasonably practical, provide employees with opportunities for flexible working according to their needs and aspirations in both their personal and working lives. Different options for flexible working include part-time working, home-working, job sharing and flexitime.
- Strengthen the role of line managers in promoting the mental wellbeing of employees through supportive leadership style and management practices.

In addition PCTs should collaborate with micro-, small- and medium-sized businesses and offer advice and a range of support. This could include access to occupational health services.

The costs associated with employees’ mental health problems can be due to loss in productivity because of sickness absence, early retirement, and increased staff turnover, recruitment and training. Evidence also shows that productivity can be reduced through the lower level of performance of employees who are at work but experiencing stress or

Amanda Killoran, Analyst
Patti White, Analyst
mental health problems. This is known as ‘presenteeism’. The guidance sets out the benefits of investing in promoting mental wellbeing in terms of improved business performance and productivity. In addition implementation of the guidance is supported by a business case report and costing tool for employers. This estimates the cost savings that may accrue from implementation of the recommendations.

**NICE’s social value principles and the stewardship model of public health**

The development of NICE public health guidance takes account of ‘the best available evidence’ but also considers social values and equity issues, as well as the feasibility of implementation. We have adopted the stewardship model, developed by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics as a reference point for guiding decisions about what types of intervention may be justified. The stewardship model is based on the idea that a liberal state has responsibilities to look after needs of people both individually and collectively, and to provide conditions that allow people to be healthy, especially in relation to reducing health inequalities, and to take an active role in promoting the health of the public. Furthermore the model defines appropriate means of achieving public health goals that are highly relevant to NICE’s purpose—promoting health through programmes to support behaviour change as well as by providing information and advice; aiming to ensure that it is easy for people to lead a healthy life through changes in the physical and social environment; ensuring that people have access to medical services and addressing health inequalities.

**References**