



An interview with Emma McCrudden Programme Manager - Well Team, NI Chest Heart & Stroke

Health & Wellbeing in the COVID-19 World



Can you adapt to deliver health and wellbeing during the current Coronavirus pandemic, was the question put to Emma McCrudden, Programme Manager of the Well Team programme at Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke.

“Yes, it has been a challenge, but one we have all risen too,” Emma said. The Public Health Agency encouraged both the teams at Northern Ireland Chest Heart and Stroke (NICHS) and at Developing Healthy Communities provider in the West, to ensure their free workplace health and wellbeing programme was still available to workplaces across NI during this challenging time.

Emma continued, “Alongside ‘Developing Healthy Communities’, we are committed to bringing the same high-quality evidence-based programme to workplaces now when they most need it. All

workplaces are experiencing change through furlough, working from home and now returning to the workplace in whatever capacity that may be. This will have a massive impact on the health and wellbeing of employees.

“We’re quite a hands-on programme, and face to face connection was a big part of what we did. Faced with the complete opposite of this, we’ve had to adapt very quickly to this new world. Employee health and wellbeing surveys being hosted online was probably the easiest part - and in reality, we’ve adapted to this quite easily and immediately saw the benefits.”

However, there were some aspects of the ‘new norm’ which were not quite so easy to get used to. “Meetings being held by video conferencing was a shock to the system, but are now the new norm for most of us and one we may continue with in the future too.” Reading non-verbal cues which, like it or not, we all use in face to face conversation, initially felt so strange. Not to mention the wacky virtual backgrounds that can take a while to get used to!”

Emma continued, “Adapting our health promotion programmes and training to work online has probably been the most challenging thing of all. But we now can offer a range of Wellbeing Webinars focused on health and wellbeing issues online, delivered by our experienced workplace health promotion team. Our

training has moved to online and we want to ensure that businesses still have that very much valued networking opportunity with other likeminded workplaces even in the current situation. We certainly have been able to achieve a lot in a short space of time.”



Emma said of getting the programme up and running in the online world, “Many of the early discussions with clients were about feasibility. But those teething problems have been overcome and although it isn’t right to say we’re back to normal, we’re open for business and ready to carry on delivering the PHA’s funded workplace health and wellbeing programme.”

Edgewater Contracts in Toome signed up to the NI Chest Heart and Stroke Well Team programme last year, and after formulating and launching their workplace health and wellbeing action plan in January, never would have thought that we would be in this situation.

Lynsey Graham, HR Manager for Edgewater Contracts said, “We had to adapt our workplace health action plan because of the current pandemic. I was delighted that NICHs could provide us with online webinars and resources to support staff at this time. We chose stress management and physical activity, which

reflected our original priorities and is also relevant to staff during this time of change for us all. We had registered employees for Mental Health First Aid as part of the programme and look forward to this being offered online over the coming months.”

Overall, despite being a challenging time for the PHA funded Workplace Health & Wellbeing Programme the changes made to cope with COVID-19 will most likely stay post pandemic. The online survey to determine an organisation’s health priorities is essential to develop a 3-year action plan that is relevant to employee needs at this time. Health Champion and Mental Health First Aid training can be delivered successfully online and access to 2 free Well Webinars allows viewers to watch and interact while following social distancing advice.

Emma concluded by saying “although face to face contact is temporarily missing it will easily slot back in once the pandemic has ended.”

Further details:

Register to find out more about the programme at www.nichs.org.uk/wellteam and Emma (or Sabrina if you are in the Western Trust area) be in touch with you shortly.

Belfast, South Eastern, Southern & Northern Trust areas

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