

COMMENT

Promoting knowledge to improve workplace safety, health and wellbeing

COVID-19 a major Mental Health issue

An article by Susan Spence



Northern Ireland
Safety Group

Promoting Occupational
Safety & Health



In a recent BBC NI¹ article Dr Laurence Dorman of the Royal College of GPs said

"What we're seeing now, as Covid has started to ease, is patients ringing our surgeries and contacting GPs having had current mental health problems exacerbated or experiencing new ones."

"A lot of patients who previously had no mental health issues have now developed new diagnoses with things like anxiety and depression, and a lot of these have been exacerbated by the social difficulties of the pandemic."

Susan Spence, Occupational Health Specialist at HSENI and a Workplace Health Leadership Group Committee member told Comment that this trend was certain to happen post pandemic with the virus's negative consequences continuing to seep into every aspect and fabric of daily life including work.

"We are all social animals" she said "and COVID-19 has forced us to behave in an extremely unsociable manner. Being isolated at home for so long inevitably would take its toll and this lack of interaction leads to all sorts of problems and behaviours. An increase in alcohol consumption, boredom, stress at having to do home schooling,

anxiety about elderly relatives, fear about what the future holds, the list goes on and on.

Uncertainty and lack of being in control can create a significant pressure that may result in a feeling of helplessness and not being able to cope. This in turn can lead to unnecessary levels of stress and all of the negative effects that can have on health.

Not being able to cope is something none of us want to see amongst family, friends or work colleagues. It is natural for most of us to want to help, yet many don't have experience in how to handle these types of situations. Couple that with a fear of saying the wrong thing and we have a potent mix of untrained people feeling helpless."



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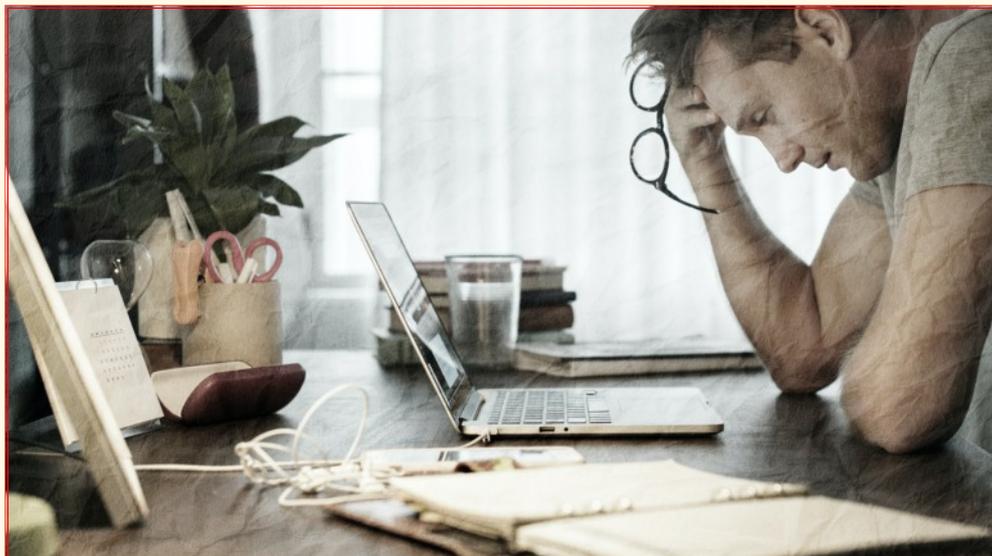
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Susan went on to explain that “Many of us have been brought up in the 'pull yourself together/stiff upper lip' culture, be it in work or at home. Yet, in reality, we don't have to be trained counsellors to assist, we just need to know how to signpost someone to the right sources of help as

It's OK not to be OK



“As we move back to the 'new' normal, the workplace has the potential to add a further layer to what for some can be a very fraught situation. Many people are concerned about their commute, the changes to their working environment and what their employers are doing to ensure their safety when they return. This is all alongside coping with the everyday challenges of life and what may be new pressures at home.

assessment-based tool to help employers manage stress at an organisational level. It also helps employers to meet their legal obligation to complete a suitable and sufficient risk assessment. HSENI's Mental Well-being at Work Advisors provide free advice, guidance and support to employers on how to control the risks associated with work-related stress using this approach.

Also, it will also be very important to have an emergency point of contact and to share this so that staff know where to access help if they need it such as Lifeline.”



While working from home is of benefit to many, it can bring its own pressures. I would ask those employers who have home working arrangements in place to please remember that this can have an impact on mental health for employees, especially when being away from colleagues and managers which can make it harder to access help and support.

Having a simple procedure in place will help managers to keep in contact with home workers and make it easier for them to recognise the signs of stress within their teams.

From a workplace perspective, tackling the burden of work-related stress remains a key priority for HSENI. One approach that employers may wish to consider in relation to work-related stress involves using the HSE Management Standards. This is a step-by-step

Lifeline

*As the effects of COVID-19 begin to manifest themselves it is important for those in need to get help. If you or someone you know are in crisis or struggling to cope during this time, call Lifeline and speak to a counsellor immediately **0808 808 800**.*

Lifeline is the Northern Ireland free-to-call crisis counselling helpline that provides immediate support for those in crisis, distress and despair. Lifeline is available to anyone across Northern Ireland 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.



The Lifeline service is staffed by qualified crisis counsellors offering immediate counselling help and support over the phone. If appropriate, Lifeline can refer you for a course of follow-on counselling support. Follow-on counselling is normally delivered face-to-face in your local community but during the coronavirus pandemic, this service is being delivered by telephone.

No matter what your age, or where you live in Northern Ireland, if you, or someone you know, is in distress or struggling to cope, Lifeline is here for you. Call today

0808 808 8000

Knowing there is a service available for people in times of need can be a great comfort and Susan would encourage you to pass this article on to others.

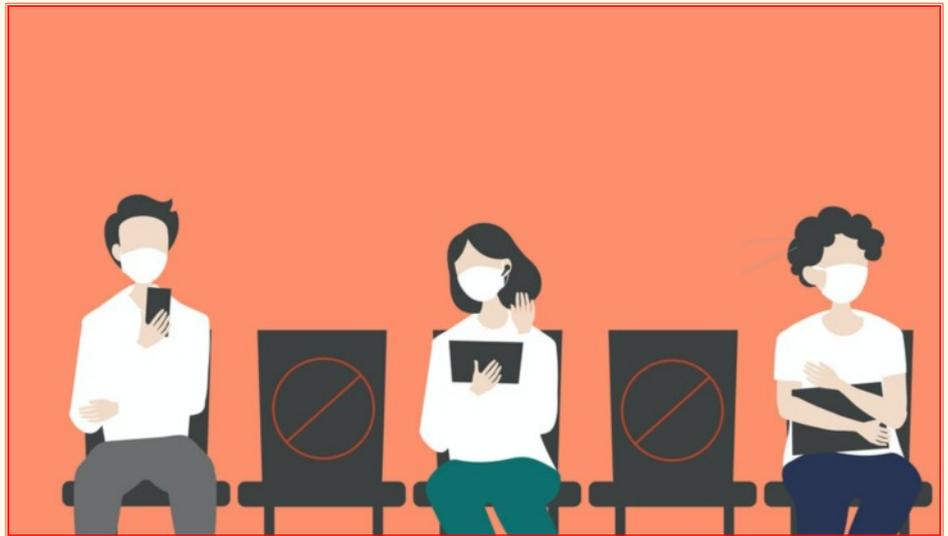
Find out more about Lifeline

<https://www.lifelinehelpline.info/page/lifeline-helpline.html>

Number for Textphone users 18001 0808 808 8000



Health & Wellbeing in the COVID-19 World



Susan also alluded to the COVID Wellbeing NI hub

COVID Wellbeing NI

An online wellbeing hub to support the mental and emotional wellbeing of people across Northern Ireland during and after the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The hub includes a comprehensive range of information, self-help guides and ways to access help to support your mental health and wellbeing and reach out for help and support when needed.

The online hub can be found at:

<https://covidwellbeingni.info/>

or visit the Minding Your Head Website:

<https://www.mindingyourhead.info/>

1 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-52830578>

