MENTAL HEALTH

IS YOUR WORKPLACE SAFE?

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Work is a big part of our lives. It can be a source of accomplishment, as well as a source of psychological suffering.

For several years now, healthcare professionals have been speaking up about their growing work load and accelerated work pace, a topic which has regularly made headlines in the last few months. Relentlessly pushing workers to do more with less resources has serious repercussions. In particular, organizational constraints like staff shortages, excessive workloads and overuse of mandatory overtime are all things that add to healthcare professionals' mental load. Furthermore, they have a huge impact on the meaning they find in their work—a profession completely focused on human relations.

Consequently, it is crucial that the mental health of healthcare professionals become a priority for both employers and the government.

"**Meaning at work is derived from the relationships a person fosters with superiors, collaborators, colleagues and clients.**"[1]

"According to researchers Pratt and Ashforth, people find their work and workplace meaningful when they see a connection and affinity between their identity, work and workplace. In other words, employees feel good when their work and workplace are meaningful to them."[2]

The findings of several mental health studies[3] helped to identify psychosocial risk factors which, when present in a workplace, seriously contribute to psychological health problems. However, when an organization/employer manages these risk factors, they become **psychosocial protective factors**, wich promote a healthy and safe psychological work environment.

[1] Estelle M. MORIN, Charles GAGNÉ and Benoit CHÉRRÉ, «Donner un sens au travail, promouvoir le bien-être psychologique», IRSST, [Online]. [http://www.irsst.qc.ca/media/documents/PubIRSST/R-624.pdf?v=2018-05-02] (Consulté le 2 mai 2018), p. 5.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY, Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addiction (CARMHA), [Online]. [https://www.sfu.ca/carmha.html] (Consulted on May 16, 2018)

The 2018 OHS Week is the perfect occasion to raise awareness among healthcare professionals about the importance of identifying these psychosocial protective factors in their workplaces. It is also a time to provide them with a table they can use to assess which psychosocial protective factors are lacking in their workplaces and identify solutions for implementing them.

In the health network, a workplace that is very demanding and in constant flux, it is extremely important to ask yourself: is your workplace safe?

Sylvain Allard, Patrice Dulmaine, Isabelle Groulx, David Lambert, Sébastien Simard and Céline Tranquille, OHS Committee members

Linda Lapointe, Political Officer for the OHS Sector

THE 13 PSYCHOSOCIAL RISK FACTORS IN THE WORKPLACE

The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace lists 13 psychosocial factors[4] which affect workers' health. These factors define the measures that should be established to safeguard mental health:

1 Organizational culture

2 Psychological and social support

3 Clear leadership and expectations

4 Civility and respect

5 Psychological demands

6 Growth and development

7 Recognition and reward

8 Involvement and influence

9 Workload management

10 Engagement

11 Balance

12 Psychological protection

13 Protection of physical safety

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[4] CSA GROUP and BUREAU DE NORMALISATION DU QUÉBEC, *CAN/CSA-Z1003-13/BNQ 9700-803/2013 - Psychological health and safety in the workplace — Prevention, promotion, and guidance to staged implementation*, 2013, 64 p.

THE 8 PRIORITY PSYCHOSOCIAL PROTECTIVE FACTORS FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS[5]

The 13 psychosocial protective factors listed in the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace are essential when it comes to creating a workplace that is psychologically healthy. However, there are 8 which are particularly important in fostering a workplace free of risks for healthcare professionals, as they take into account their specific work conditions. A few characteristics are suggested below for each of these protective factors in order to assess how common they are in a workplace.

1. Organizational culture

- All people in the workplace are held accountable for their actions.
- Difficult situations at work are addressed effectively.
- Healthcare professionals and the employer trust one another.

2. Psychological and social support

- The employer offers services or benefits that address healthcare professionals' psychological and mental health.
- Healthcare professionals feel that they are part of a community and are supported by their colleagues in their duties.
- The employer has an intervention process in place if healthcare professionals' seem distressed at work.

3. Clear leadership and expectations

- Healthcare professionals know what is expected of them at work.
- Leadership in the workplace is effective.
- Healthcare professionals are informed about important changes that affect their work in a timely manner.

4. Psychological demands

- The employer verifies existing work methods and allows for work reorganization.

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[5] The characteristics for each protective factor were taken and adapted from the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace, Can/CSA-Z1003-13/BNQ9700-803/2013. For the purpose of this exercise, only the characteristics most relevant to healthcare professionals' work experience were used.

- The employer assesses the demands on healthcare professionals and job control issues such as physical and psychological demands.
- The employer monitors the management system to address behaviours that could impact healthcare professionals in their workplace.

5. Involvement and influence

- Healthcare professionals have some control over how they organize their work.
- Healthcare professionals' opinions and suggestions are considered with respect to work.
- Healthcare professionals are informed of important changes that can impact how their work is done.

6. Workload management

- The amount of work healthcare professionals are expected to do is reasonable for their positions.
- Healthcare professionals can talk to their supervisors about the amount of work they have to do.
- Healthcare professionals have an appropriate level of control over prioritizing tasks and responsibilities when facing multiple demands.

7. Balance

- The employer encourages healthcare professionals to take the breaks and time off to which they are entitled (e.g., lunchtime, sick time, vacation time, earned days off, parental leave).
- Healthcare professionals are able to reasonably meet the demands of personal life and work.
- Healthcare professionals have energy left at the end of most workdays for their personal life.

8. Psychological protection

- The employer is committed to minimizing unnecessary stress at work.
- Immediate supervisors care about healthcare professionals' emotional well-being.
- The employer makes efforts to prevent harm to healthcare professionals from harassment, discrimination, violence, stigma, etc.

To assess whether your workplace is safe,

visit fiqsante.qc.ca/sst2018

and fill out the table to assess the psychosocial

protective factors in your workplace.

SOLUTIONS

Psychosocial protective factors are a good indicator of a psychologically healthy workplace. When they are lacking, it shows that there are significant risks that need to be addressed. When a problem is observed, it is essential to begin thinking about possible solutions. These solutions may come from various levels of intervention: individual, union or organizational. Below is a list of possible solutions that you can use as a tool to reflect on ways of better protecting mental health at work.

Individual

Healthcare professionals:

- List all of the risky situations in your workplace based on the characteristics of the 8 protective factors mentioned in the previous section;
- Call on the employer, OHS joint committee or the union team to speak up about the lack of one or more protective factors in the workplace and the subsequent risks created for employees' mental health.

Union

The union team:

- Ask the employer to intervene when a significant problem is identified within a work team (difficult work climate, work overload, etc.);
- Call on the employer regarding problems that impact its members' mental health;
- Ask the employer to apply the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace.[6]

Organizational

The organization/employer:

- Apply the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace;[7]
- Deploy a workplace strategy for mental health;[8]
- Conduct a full assessment of the psychosocial risk factors in the workplace based on the Institut national de santé publique du Québec's (INSPQ) table.[9]

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[6] CSA GROUP and BUREAU DE NORMALISATION DU QUÉBEC, *op. cit.*

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] Jean-Pierre BRUN, Caroline BIRON and France ST-HILAIRE, *Guide pour une démarche stratégique de prévention des problèmes de santé psychologique au travail, Québec, CGSST-Université Laval*, 2009, 68 p.

[9] Michel VÉZINA et al., *Tool for identifying Psychosocial Risk Factors in the Workplace*, Québec, INSPQ, 2009, [online]. [https://www.inspq.qc.ca/sites/default/files/publications/2401_indicators_tool_identifying_psychosocial_risk_factors_workplace.pdf] (Consulted on May 15, 2018)

Over the last months, several questions have been raised about healthcare professionals' mental health at work, not only by nurses, licensed practical nurses, respiratory therapists and clinical perfusionists but also citizens who are concerned about the conditions of practice of those who care for them.

Beginning to reflect on which psychosocial protective factors are present or lacking in a workplace constitutes a first step towards identifying threats to healthcare professionals' mental health. To determine individual, union and organizational solutions is to pave the way to lightening healthcare professionals' daily mental load.

Happy 2018 OHS Week!

Notes

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