

WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY – PASS THE BADGE

Mental Health In The Workplace

What a year 2020 has been and it's by no means over yet! As the year has progressed and society has struggled to come to terms with the impact of the pandemic, the importance of organisations recognising the role they can play in supporting the mental health of their people has become critical. Within the Faculty of Advocates we already had a range of support mechanisms in place but we have kept these under continual review to make sure they are as accessible and as effective as possible. For example we have regularly promoted our existing counselling facility which is available to all our teams and their immediate families, and also moved our in-house yoga sessions online and encouraged regular and new attendees to take part. We already had five trained mental health first aiders and we can draw on their expertise to assist on specific or general issues as they arise.

Although these measures and mechanisms were designed in a pre-Covid world they have really come into their own during the pandemic. However, we realised early in the disruption that additional support would be required as our teams came to terms with the abrupt change in their working environment and juggled their domestic responsibilities. Early in the lockdown period we therefore introduced Mental Health Days which allowed everyone who was not furloughed to take an additional day's leave every two weeks if they felt it would be beneficial. The response was very positive. Not everyone took the full number of days available but the flexibility the initiative offered was well received. I believe it contributed significantly to our ability to maintain our service to our Advocates.

On a personal level, I have found that the past few months have presented many challenges both physical and mental. Although commuting in Edinburgh can be a pain, I found the "dead" time on a bus at the end of the day a good way of switching off from work and clearing my mind. It's difficult to replicate that period of transition when you are working at home but I have tried to recreate it by identifying some activity that marks the end of the work day. It could be taking the dog for a walk, reading a book or magazine or even doing a jigsaw (I can recommend www.jigsawplanet.com). A longer break from work is also essential and I have always believed it is important to fully use your holiday allowance. Even if you can't travel, having the time to yourself is key and you can use the time to relax as suits you best. For the first time, I temporarily disabled my work email account on my phone during my holiday this year. It's a great relief not to see the notification of unread emails reaching three figures on the second day of your holiday!

Looking ahead, it seems likely that some form of restrictions will be in place well into 2021. For many this may mean that Christmas this year will be very different to normal and we need to be alive to the potential mental health impacts. The traditional ethos of caring and giving will remain key but we will all need to find different ways of interpreting it, both at home and in the workplace.