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Reg. charity no. 1117580

The OxHA workplace health programme

The Oxford Health Alliance (OxHA) is a global charity committed to combating the worldwide epidemic of chronic disease. By focusing on the **3** risk factors of smoking, poor diet and lack of physical exercise, 80% of premature cardiovascular disease, diabetes and chronic respiratory illness as well as 40% of cancers can be prevented. These **four** diseases account for over **50%** of deaths in the world.

Chronic disease is responsible for heavy costs on employers through absenteeism and reduced productivity. Many employers recognise that investing in employee health directly affects their financial performance and improves their reputation with their workforce and beyond.

OxHA is not a consultancy but works with any employer who wishes to see these benefits, and is urging governments to support programmes that will impact on a key age range (16–60-year-olds), people who spend about 40% of their waking hours at work, and people (especially men) who may not come in contact with health services.

OxHA offers an approach to a workplace health programme that can be used by employers in any workplace. A programme needs to be designed for the specific workplace/company. It will require the commitment of top management and the involvement of staff representatives. What follows is an approach that is simple, but which needs the work and commitment of individuals to find an approach that suits each organisation, has high rates of participation and is sustained.

- ❖ **The healthiest 25% of the workforce is naturally 18% more productive at work than the least healthy 25%.**
- ❖ **Health promotion programmes are cost-effective, with returns on investment demonstrated of two to eight times the amount invested.**

Assessment of the workplace

Current health programmes

Many employers already offer some health programmes, including health and safety, occupational health and private health insurance.

Smoking

Is help provided to those wishing to stop smoking? classes? nicotine replacement therapy?

- ❖ **Smokers have absenteeism rates 50% higher and job-related accidents twice as high on average than non-smokers.**

Diet

Is there a cafeteria? Vending machines? Do they have/encourage healthy options?

Are staff helped to have a better diet?

Is there information on healthy eating? Are there incentives to eat healthily? Are there cookery classes? Weight-reduction programmes?

- ❖ **Obese employees are more than twice as likely to experience high-level absenteeism and 1.5 times more likely to suffer from moderate absenteeism as those of recommended weight.**

Physical activity

Are stairs easy to use and use of the lifts discouraged?

Are staff encouraged to exercise? Are there incentives? Are there on-site exercise facilities?

Are there facilities to store bicycles? Are there walking clubs or other group activities?

- ❖ **High levels of fitness programme participation tend to be associated with decreased levels of short-term absenteeism.**

Individual assessments

Information

Individual working places will hold some information on the health and behaviour of employees, including sickness, absence, turnover – and possibly much more.

Survey

Confidential survey of staff will be done, summarised anonymously for management purposes.

Focus groups

Group discussion forums will add to the information gathered from the survey.

Individual assessment

Staff should be offered confidential personal assessments of their individual risk factors, such as medical history, blood pressure, body mass index, levels of cholesterol and blood sugar.

OxHA's unique role

Workplace health programmes may encompass health and safety, absence management, return to work and occupational health. OxHA does not provide these, instead working with key staff and representatives to increase the opportunities for all staff to stop smoking, eat healthily and take regular exercise.

OxHA is a diverse network of academic and other experts who can offer evidence-based solutions.

- OxHA is a member of the project boards of the *World Economic Forum's* Working towards Wellness initiative, *BUPA's* Health at Work and *Dame Carol Black's* Sounding Board.
- OxHA is working with *Business in the Community*, *BUPA*, *PepsiCo*, *Nestlé*, *Novo Nordisk* and the *UK Government*.
- OxHA has *Community Interventions for Health action research programmes* starting in workplaces in China, England (Leicester), India, Mexico and Tunisia.

OxHA does not believe that one solution fits all, but recommends:

- **assessment** of each workplace and confidential individual assessment;
- developing a **risk-factor profile, data gathering and analysis**;
- **feedback** to individuals and anonymously to the company;
- **assessment** of what employees want from a health programme;
- developing a range of **options**.
- **OxHA** then hands the programme over to be run by the employees themselves but makes regular periodic **revisits and evaluation**.

OxHA's workplace programme is led by Christine Hancock, a former NHS CEO and past General Secretary of the Royal College of Nursing and President of the International Council of Nurses.

OxHA wants to work with more employers to promote workplace health and spread the benefits to more companies and their employees. To know more, please contact: christine.hancock@oxha.org