



STRESS MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE

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Stress Management Procedure

1. Background

In its' Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) has committed to providing a supportive working environment that maintains and promotes the health and wellbeing of staff. The Trust acknowledges that due to the emergency nature of providing an ambulance service staff are expected to deal with potentially stressful situations in carrying out their professional role. The policy highlights that staff will receive the appropriate education, training and support in order to fulfil their duty successfully. This Stress Management Procedure operates under the remit of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy and supplements other related NIAS policies and procedures.

- 1.1 The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Health and Social Care Trust (NIAS) acknowledge that stress can exist in the workplace and that a psychologically healthy workforce when combined with a supportive work environment will benefit staff and employers alike.
- 1.2 NIAS is required, under the Health and Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978 to take whatever steps are reasonably practical to prevent employees becoming ill because of work. Whilst the scope of this procedure is to cover workplace stress, the Trust recognises that sources external to the workplace may be significant in causing stress for people. When identifying and dealing with stress, the Trust will endeavour, if the individual is willing, to discuss these issues.
- 1.3 Employees have a responsibility to co-operate with the implementation of the Stress Management Procedure.

2 Definition of Stress at Work

Stress is defined by Health and Safety Executive as “***the reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them***”. NIAS recognises that while providing an effective Ambulance Service to patients and providing a motivating environment for staff it must so far as is reasonably practicable avoid harmful levels of stress.

Stress as well as affecting the health of the employee, can also result in an increase in unhealthy behaviour (i.e. smoking and drinking), increased levels of sickness, reduction in performance, a lack of communication, high staff turnover, high levels of grievance cases, an increase in accident rates and an increase in workload/pressure for the remaining workforce and a reduction in staff morale.

3 Possible symptoms and causes of stress

It must be realised that stress is not a sign of weakness. It can affect anyone, at any stage in their life. No one is immune to stress. It is important however that you are able to recognise the causes of excessive stress so that they can be minimised or avoided completely. There will be occasions where the source of the problem is wholly unavoidable and it is in these circumstances that careful management will be necessary to avoid staff becoming unwell. A list of possible symptoms (stress indicators) as well as causes (stressors) are listed in Appendix I.

It must be emphasized that maintaining a healthy workforce is not only the responsibility of the Trust; it also lies with the individual to take appropriate steps to alleviate the causes of stress, if they are within their control. Individual members of staff have a duty to take responsible care both of their own health and general fitness and of the health and welfare of others who could be affected by their actions. Ways of dealing with everyday stress are highlighted in Appendix II.

NIAS will ensure the risk assessment process will be used, as appropriate, to identify workplace stressors and control and mitigate against the risks associated with stress.

4 Aims

This procedure aims to:

- Increase general awareness that stress exists in the workplace and is an issue which requires openness and understanding of both the employee and the organisation as a whole.
- Create and highlight the methods available to manage stress.
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- Provide a clear framework within which unreasonable workplace stressors can be identified, managed, mitigated against or potentially eliminated.
- Protect employees ensuring that they are not discriminated against because of their difficulties and are given the necessary support available.

5. NIAS Responsibilities

The Chief Executive has overall responsibility to ensure that issues involving stress are managed and dealt with appropriately. This duty is delegated to the Director of Human Resources, however, each individual manager retains a duty of care and responsibility for each of their members of staff.

6. Management Responsibilities

To ensure that:

- Each member of staff is clear about their individual roles and responsibilities within their own department as well as the organisation as a whole.
- Each individual member of staff is competent and supported in doing their job through the provision of adequate resources, support, education and training.
- Stress risk assessments are carried out within their departments and that suitable control measures are in place, as appropriate. These stress risk assessments must be monitored continually with appropriate action being taken when new or additional stress indicators are identified.
- All reports of stress are investigated promptly in conjunction with the Human Resources Department and all reasonably practicable steps required are taken to rectify the situation.
- Communication between Management and staff is effective, particularly in relation to organisational or procedural change.
- Workloads and working hours are monitored regularly and dealt with reasonably.
- Bullying and harassment is not tolerated in their jurisdiction.
- Support is offered to staff who are experiencing stress outside work.
- Support Trade Union Representatives through release for training as appropriate and facilitating attendance at relevant NIAS training events.

7. Employee Responsibilities

- Recognise their own training and development needs and discuss with line management.
- Recognise their shared responsibility to identify stress in themselves and others at an early stage.
- Raise issues of concern promptly with their line managers so that they can be addressed at an early stage. (If staff find approaching their line manager on these issues difficult for any reason, they can approach a more senior manager or the HR Department).
- Accept opportunities for counselling and other forms of NIAS support in rectifying the situation.

8. Types of support/help available

Counselling Service: NIAS has access to an independent confidential counselling service which can be contacted confidentially on **0500 127 079**

Occupational Health: Staff can also make a self referral to Occupational Health should they feel it is appropriate, or they can ask that their line manager refers them.

Human Resources: Human Resources staff are available for individual confidential consultation if staff wish to discuss any issues relating to the policy or their post.

Trade Union: If a member of a Trade Union, staff may wish to speak to their Trade Union representative.

9. Handling Individual Cases

When a line manager is made aware that an employee is experiencing stress within their job/organisation they should, in consultation with a Human Resources representative, initiate an investigation into the possible causes of the work related problem. The results from this investigation will be used within the risk assessment framework to identify, control, mitigate against, manage and potentially eliminate, if

appropriate, workplace stressors. Where necessary and feasible, modifications will be made to the work situation taking into account Occupational Health advice in order to

relieve stress. Any changes will be documented in writing and will be monitored closely by the line manager over a specified period of time.

Where more significant longer term change is necessary, other changes will be considered, for example, modification to current job role, reduced working week, transfer etc. The overall aim is to provide support and give help to the individual. However, where termination of contract due to ill health is necessary, all factors will be taken into account and this will only be considered when all other rehabilitative efforts have failed. In this instance the Attendance Management Policy and Procedure will be followed.

Returning to work after a stress-related absence requires careful thought and planning by all involved. It is important that the employee is well supported by line management upon return to work, with a review of work performance carried out on a regular basis.

A return to work interview will be carried out by the employee's manager, as is normal procedure for any employee returning after sickness absence. This interview may be useful in determining if any modifications need to be made to the employee's job and if further action or support is required.

This procedure will be regularly monitored and reviewed and any modifications made to ensure its continued effectiveness will be communicated to all employees within a reasonable period of time. Any changes/modifications will be consulted on through the Health & Safety Committee.

10. Equality Statement

The Procedure has been drawn up and reviewed in light of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) which requires the Trust to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity.

In line with the duty of equality, this Policy has been assessed against particular criteria.

APPENDIX I – SYMPTOMS AND CAUSES OF STRESS

Possible Symptoms

There are various effects that stress can have on an individual, some of which can be recognised by fellow work colleagues and line managers. It is important to note, however, that recognition of any the following traits in yourself does not necessarily mean you are experiencing dangerous stress but recognition of the potential indicators may help you to avoid them.

Emotional Impact

- Increased levels of hostility, irritability, and anger leading to emotional outbursts.
- Feeling down or in a depressed state
- Frenetic rushing about trying to do various tasks and getting more and more flustered resulting in lack of productivity.
- Lack of confidence, constantly seeking reassurance form others.
- Total indifference of other's needs/wants.
- The inability to relax, to feel good or to switch off.
- Personality traits may change completely where a normally neat and tidy person may appear somewhat dishevelled and untidy.

Cognitive Impact

- Concentration difficulties, where your capacity for making decisions is reduced.
- Difficulty remembering details and items.
- Unable to switch off.
- Responses erratic and impulsive.
- Mistakes and errors more frequent and judgement impaired.

Physical Impact

- Might become more difficult to get to sleep at night or stay asleep for more than a few hours. Indigestion, heartburn, palpitations, dizziness, sweating, dry mouth, headaches, overeating/loss of appetite.
- Might find yourself drinking more caffeine/nicotine /alcohol.
- May lose interest in normal hobbies and external interests.

Sometimes stress may be temporary and brought on by circumstantial reasons like starting a new job or family sickness. At other times it can be cumulative, building up over a period of time with constant work pressure and family worries of a more serious nature.

Possible Causes

Different causes of stress exist and can include:

Culture

- Lack of communication and consultation.
- A culture of blame when things go wrong.
- Denial of potential problems.
- Staff encouraged to work long hours and/or to take work home.

Demands

- Too much to do, too little time.
- Too little or too much training for the job.
- Boring or repetitive work, or too little to do.
- Unfair allocation of work.
- Unrealistic targets.
- Lack of supervision.
- Inadequate staffing levels.
- Risk of violence.
- Lack of feedback.

Control

- Low participation in decision making.
- Little influence on how work is organised.

Relationships

- Conflict between departments.
- Poor relationships with supervisors.



- Poor relationships with colleagues.
- Harassment/bullying.

Change

- Uncertainty about what is happening.
- Fears about job security.
- Introduction of new technology.
- Lack of training.

Role

- Staff unclear about work objectives.
- Staff feeling that the job requires them to behave in conflicting ways at the same time.
- Lack of clarity regarding role and responsibilities.

Support

- Lack of training.
- Lack of career progression.
- Colleagues not pulling their weight.

Outside work

- Moving house.
- Pregnancy.
- Retirement.
- Illness/injury.
- Working and studying.
- Money worries.

APPENDIX II – INDIVIDUAL STRESS AVOIDANCE TECHNIQUES

Find out what things help you relax and try to do them regularly.

Relax

- Recognise when you are tense and try and deal with the situation you are faced with
- Make time for yourself
- Laughter often relieves stress and tension
- Go for a walk/take some exercise
- Listen to your favourite music
- Take up yoga or a similar interest
- Have a bath
- Borrow a relaxation tape from your local library

Think positively

- We all make mistakes and we don't always get things right first
- Ask for help if you need it
- Try to co-operate with other colleagues, they may well be feeling the pressure too
- Listen to colleagues' opinions and negotiate a compromise

Plan

- Plan ahead if you can and put tasks in order of priority
- Write down all the things you are worried about, they are often not quite as bad as previously thought
- Make lists and put them where you can find them
- Set realistic achievable goals for yourself and reward yourself when you have achieved them



Diet

- A balanced diet and regular meals will help you to cope with stress.

Exercise

- Exercise regularly – the feel good factor – there is evidence that this is a major help in dealing with stress. If exercise is undertaken it can take three to four weeks before it is enjoyed so persevere.
- Also remember, if you are feeling stressors are becoming overwhelming, there is a confidential free-phone telephone number to discuss any problems you may be facing.