Stress and Mental Wellbeing Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author:</th>
<th>Annette Shorts, Lead Occupational Health Nurse Advisor, Salus Occupational Health, Safety and Return to Work Services</th>
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<tr>
<td>Responsible Lead Executive Director:</td>
<td>Kenny Small, HR Director</td>
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<td>Endorsing Body:</td>
<td>Human Resources Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assurance Committee</td>
<td>Staff Governance Group</td>
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<td>Implementation Date:</td>
<td>March 2014</td>
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<td>Version Number:</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Responsible Person:</td>
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**CHANGE RECORD**

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Stress and Mental Wellbeing Policy

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 NHS Lanarkshire is committed to the health and wellbeing of all employees by placing value on both physical and mental health. We acknowledge that stress may have many causes, including both work and non-work related factors. Factors which may lead to increased stress in clinical or non-clinical environments in an NHS organisation include; threat of violence and aggression, lack of workspace, work overload, management style, bullying & harassment. We also recognise that domestic factors (housing, family problems, financial issues and bereavement) may also add to levels of stress experienced by our staff, and that the current climate of austerity could be an added pressure for many people.

Mental wellbeing can take many different forms, but a useful description is feeling good and functioning well. Good mental wellbeing does not mean that you never experience feelings or situations that you find difficult. But it does mean that you feel you have the resilience to cope when times are tougher than usual. NHS Choices. [www.nhs.uk/Conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/Pages/improve-mental-wellbeing.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/Pages/improve-mental-wellbeing.aspx)

Stress can be described as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed on them”. Stress is not an illness – it is a state. However, if stress becomes too excessive and prolonged, mental and physical illness may develop.

Stress related sickness absence has a significant impact upon both the individual and the organisation as the employee can be absent for lengthy periods due to the nature of the issues involved. Whilst debilitating for the employee it also can result in the perception of increased workload within the workplace.

1.2 NHS Lanarkshire is committed to a plan of action that includes:

- Taking action to help staff stay at work or manage the return to work of those who have mental or physical health problems associated with stress to make sure their skills are not lost;
- Increasing awareness of the steps to take to improve and maintain good health
- Provide information on the causes of stress in the organisation;
- Taking action to tackle stress and helping staff to manage stress
- Managing health problems associated with stress by:
  - Recognising stress early;
  - Managing stress appropriately;
  - Providing access to counselling; and
  - Providing advice and sources of help.

2. **AIM, PURPOSE AND OUTCOME**

Stress is an issue which can affect anyone at any time. The aim of this policy is to promote mental wellbeing while recognising that the organisation will -

- Encourage staff well-being within NHS Lanarkshire and discourage the stigma attached to stress;
- Enhance the factors within NHS Lanarkshire that reduce the risk of stress;
- Raise awareness of ill health associated with stress, its causes and associated factors; through appropriate interventions
- Highlight stress, which is likely to lead to ill health, and reduce this from the work environment as far as possible;
- Consider aspects of the workplace which have been identified through risk assessment as increasing the stress risk; (See appendix 1)
- Provide systems of support and make sure they are well publicised;
- Through information and education, encourage everyone to recognise and address problems;
- Offer early, easy access to counselling and other professional help and ensure there is confidentiality for those who want help (from whatever source);
- Reduce anxieties regarding, job security, sick leave, the retention of status and make sure that there is no blame attached to those using the support mechanisms;
- Encourage staff to get help at an early stage;
- Set up procedures for return to, and rehabilitation in work, in accordance with appropriate HR policies and procedures. E.g. temporary workplace adjustments where appropriate.
- Make sure that these procedures are flexible enough to meet varying needs.

3. **SCOPE**

This policy applies to all directly employed staff of NHS Lanarkshire, irrespective of age, sex, ethnicity/race, disability, marital or civil partnership status, sexual orientation, religion or belief, pregnancy or maternity or gender reassignment.

4. **PRINCIPAL CONTENT**

5. **Roles and Responsibilities**

5.1 **Senior Managers** are responsible for:

- Promoting an organisational culture where stress is not seen as a sign of weakness or incompetence and where seeking help in managing stress is seen as a sign of strength and good practice;

- Giving suitable advice, support and guidance to managers to equip them to undertake the necessary risk assessments in relation to stress in the workplace, and effective control measures implemented where appropriate;

- Providing information for staff on:
  - The effects of stress at work;
  - Positive coping mechanisms; and
  - General health improving activities within the workplace;
  - How to recognise symptoms of stress in themselves and others (Appendix 1)

- Promoting a working environment where staff who feel they are at risk of being affected by stress can raise the issue in confidence, and necessary support mechanisms will be put in place;

- Providing suitable support mechanisms for staff experiencing stress; and

- Providing good practice guidelines based on current evidence and knowledge.
5.2 **Line Managers** are responsible for:

- Carrying out the Stress Risk Assessment and involving individual staff and staff teams in seeking solutions;

- Encouraging a workplace culture where mental well-being and physical well-being are regarded as equally important.

- Making sure, as far as reasonably practical, that the physical work environments for staff are safe and do not expose them to risks that may give rise to stress at work.

- Considering the implications for staff of any changes to working practices, ways of working, work location, new policies or procedures, and the need for appropriate support and training;

- Ensuring that all new staff receive appropriate induction to and training for their job, including reference to support services other than at unit level, e.g. Occupational Health, Human Resources, Employee Counselling Service, Healthy Working Lives, Citizens Advice Bureau,

- Providing clear job descriptions (outlining lines of responsibility, accountability, and reporting), individual supervision and clear objectives with review;

- Resolving work related issues at individual level and at team level as appropriate, involving others outside the team as necessary;

- Managing absence in accordance with organisational policy, and linking to other policies as necessary, such as Preventing and Dealing with Bullying, Harassment and Victimisation;

- Keeping in touch with any staff member who is on prolonged absence as per Sickness Absence Policy and local guidelines and agree with the individual, Occupational Health and Human Resources how to support their return to work;

- Reviewing regularly excess hours worked by staff, time back, monitoring absence and staff turnover, and carrying out exit interviews;

- Making sure that staff teams take time to review and celebrate positive achievements and likewise less positive outcomes so that a sense of balance can be achieved; and
Agreeing with staff teams what can be actioned and how to improve things, promoting openness and discussion.

5.3 **Human Resource staff are** responsible for:

- Making sure that organisational policies and codes of conduct (professional and general) are adhered to;
- Facilitating discussions / mediation within areas of conflict;
- Monitoring staff conduct, attendance, turnover, via The Staff Governance Committee.
- Advocating clarity of roles and responsibilities, providing advice to managers regarding clear job descriptions (outlining lines of responsibility, accountability, and reporting) and advising on organisational structure.
- Promoting positive culture change within the workforce.

5.4 **Trade Unions/Professional Organisations** are responsible for:

- Encouraging members to speak up as soon as they feel that their working environment is beginning to affect their health;
- Using the facilities laid out in the Safety Representative and Safety Committees (SRSC) Regulations and Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations to tackle work-related stress;
- Investigating potential hazards and complaints from their members, receiving information they need from employers to protect members’ health and safety;
- Liaising with management to carry out risk assessment, including reviewing absence figures and linking these with other policies that may be available such as Preventing and Dealing with Bullying, Harassment and Victimisation;
- Encouraging members to record and report issues so that managers can take forward

5.5 **Occupational Health Services** are responsible for:

- Advising managers and staff on occupational stressors and the risk assessment process;
- Providing information, advice and support on stress risk assessment/awareness and management as required;
- Providing support for staff at all levels who may be experiencing the negative effects of stress
- Offering access to OH case management services which complement the existing OH services in relation to mental health and wellbeing issues including stress
- Providing information to staff attending Occupational Health on available support systems within NHS Lanarkshire
- Working with Healthy Working Lives Groups to help provide information and support to staff including lifestyle checks and stress awareness presentations when requested
- Monitoring work-related stress in terms of sickness absence patterns and self/management referrals and providing appropriate feedback to the organisation.
- Providing tailored stress management training for staff/managers when indicated or requested
- Advising on internal or external services for appropriate training / support / signposting where available. E.g. Mental health training for managers via Healthy Working Lives; Organisational Development, Health Improvement
- Providing information and signposting to appropriate internal and external support services in relation to specific stressor e.g. Employee Counselling service, debt management services, mediation, Ending Violence and Abuse (EVA),

5.6 All Staff are responsible for:
- Recognising that stress is not a weakness;
- Talking to their manager as soon as possible if there is a problem, or accessing OHS, HR or their Trade Union/Professional Organisation;
- Supporting their colleagues if they are experiencing stress and encouraging them to talk to their manager, OHS, HR or Trade Union/Professional Organisation;
- Seeking support or counselling from Occupational Health Services.
- Speaking to their G.P. if worried about mental wellbeing or health issues;
Discussing with their manager whether it is possible to alter or modify the job on a temporary or permanent basis, to reduce stress levels, recognising all team members’ needs;

Positively channelling their energy into solving the problem rather than just worrying about it, thinking about what may resolve any issues and discussing this with their manager;

Considering advice and recommendations offered to help reduce or alleviate symptoms of stress and optimise wellbeing.

Attending agreed stress management courses where appropriate, available and organisationally feasible

Being actively involved in the risk assessment process.

6. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

To deal positively with stress at the workplace, NHS Lanarkshire recognises the importance of:

- The link between home and the workplace;
- Identifying particularly vulnerable groups; and
- The effects of prescribed medication on work performance.

These key points will be highlighted in:

- Health education for staff;
- Development for staff to meet their work demands;
- Induction programmes for new staff;
- Training programmes for managers;
- Specific training for Occupational Health Practitioners;

7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

No significant cost implications however time required for all involved to carry out roles within the policy, attend training and any activities associated with this policy.
8. **COMMUNICATION PLAN**


9. **MONITORING AND REVIEWING**

This policy has been developed in partnership and will be subject to ongoing monitoring and will be reviewed every 3 years by the Joint Policy Forum and ratified by the Human Resources Forum. As well as the policy itself, the risk-assessment process should be reviewed in light of any changes to work activities or significant organisational change. Regular evaluation of staff turnover, sickness absence, accidents/incidents will also contribute to the monitoring and reviewing of the policy.

9. **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

This policy meets NHS Lanarkshire’s EDIA
Appendix 1

STRESS AND MENTAL WELLBEING

Stress affects us in many ways, including the way we feel, behave and think. It can influence us physically, emotionally and psychologically, both at home and work, and can have an impact on our relationships, including family, friends and colleagues.

What are some of the causes of Stress?

Causes can be personal, work related, or a combination of both. These can include inter-personal relationships, family/personal problems, ill health, childcare issues, change, environmental, too much work/too little work, time management issues, control over workload, perceived lack of support, clarity of role etc.

In relation specifically to the workplace, stress can result in reduced ability to make decisions, forgetfulness, reduced concentration, absenteeism, poorer outcomes, lack of communication and commitment, increased incidents of accidents/errors, and can lead to less job satisfaction.

Possible Effects

- Physically, the effects could include symptoms of aches and pains, numbness, palpitations, increased Blood Pressure, tremor, sweating and “butterflies in the stomach”. This may in turn effect our –
- Behaviour, and can result in emotional outbursts, eating too much/too little, increased smoking/alcohol intake and antagonist tendencies.
- Feelings can include anxiety, tiredness, low mood, frustration, loneliness, irritability and aggressiveness.

What can we do to help ourselves deal with the negative effects of stress and improve our mental wellbeing? –

- Change our outlook,
- Change our situation,
- Change our mindset.
- Take care of each other and ourselves.
- Discuss your feelings with your manager.
- Take time for rest and relaxation, be aware of local & national campaigns, increase our exercise, increase awareness of leisure services and discounts for NHS Lanarkshire staff, eat healthier, utilise specialist agencies and NHS Lanarkshire staff benefits.
- Salus Occupational Health is available for help, support, information and advice.
- Employee Counselling Service is available to all staff, for telephone counselling or structured face-to-face counselling.
## STRESS RISK ASSESSMENT

### SECTION 1

**Work Area /Department:**

**Staff Groups Covered:**

**Line Manager (s):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators of stress</th>
<th>Outline here any general indications of the level of stress, e.g. staff turnover, sickness absence rate, work related absences, staff feedback. These may indicate high or low levels of stress</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff turnover</td>
<td>Sickness absence rate</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Complaints of work stress</td>
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<td>Absences related to stress</td>
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</table>

### SECTION 2: Stressors Particular to the Department/Area of Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stressor</th>
<th>Staff groups affected</th>
<th>Control measures</th>
<th>Assessment of risk (High–medium–low)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>See guidance notes: examples may include stressors such as temperature, noise, threat of violence, emotional demands.</td>
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### SECTION 3: HSE MANAGEMENT STANDARDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STANDARD</th>
<th>Indicators of performance <em>(e.g. staff survey, local survey, focus group feedback, other staff feedback)</em></th>
<th>Control measures</th>
<th>Assessment of risk <em>(High–medium–low)</em></th>
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<tr>
<td>Demand</td>
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<td>Control</td>
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<td>Support</td>
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<td>Relationships</td>
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<td>Change</td>
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**OVERALL RISK ASSESSMENT** *(HIGH–MEDIUM–LOW)*

This sums up your overall assessment of risk taking into account indicators of stress, sections 1 and 2.
### SECTION 4

**ACTION PLAN**: Indicate here any actions identified that may improve stress levels. Indicate actions taken and outcome.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible actions</th>
<th>Action taken</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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Date of completion………………………       Review……………………………………..
Signed…………………………………….        Title……………………………………….
GUIDANCE ON COMPLETION OF THE STRESS RISK ASSESSMENT

Introduction
Conducting a risk assessment for stress at work is a requirement under the Management of Health and Safety at Work regulations. Stress has been defined as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them". The risk assessment is based on the workplace and should focus on elements of work which could result in harm to health through stress.

The following may help you complete the Stress Risk Assessment.

SECTION 1. You can complete this section with information already available to you.
- Indicate the work area or department relevant, staff groups covered and the relevant line manager/managers if there is a mix of professional groups.
- Record any information that might indicate the general level of stress in the workforce in this area. This might be absence rates (if known), turnover, staff absence known to be linked with workplace stress, staff complaints or feedback concerning work stress. The result of the Staff Governance survey may also be relevant.

If the information available to you suggests that the risk is Low, proceed to Section 4, complete the Risk Assessment and give a review date. If not, proceed to Section 2.

SECTION 2
In this section, you first identify if there are any special features of the workplace or the work conducted in the area which are particularly likely to cause stress.

Examples might be physical factors such as noise, temperature, etc threats such as risk of violence, aggression or verbal abuse from clients, or factors such as the need to provide an emergency response, regularly break bad news, deal with traumatic incidents, deal with death, especially in children or young adults. These are only examples – there may be other stressors peculiar to your workplace.

Only record these if you or your staff believe that these issues pose a particular, unusual stressor in your work area. Recording every possible occasional stressor may distract from the really important stressors. You may decide there are no special features or stressors which should be recorded under section 2, and you can then go to Section 4.

Once you have listed the stressors, record any control measures that are in place to help reduce the risk of stress and record whether the risk
remains high, medium or low. Control measures might be departmental systems, clinical supervision, policies and procedures or other measures.

If you now have enough information to make a decision about the level of RISK go to Section 4 and complete the Risk Assessment. If you are unable to make a decision on RISK go to SECTION 3.

SECTION 3
You may wish to obtain further information on which to base your assessment. You can consider the 6 HSE management standards and assess how your department or area rates against these standards. Details of this are in Appendix 2.

Possible methods of obtaining information would be:

- Obtaining views of staff through existing groups such as open discussions, departmental meetings, partnership meetings, etc. It is important that staff side reps have the opportunity to contribute if this option is chosen.

- Conducting focus groups with a representative group of staff. HSE has issued guidance about how to conduct focus group work. ([http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/pdfs/focusgroups.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/pdfs/focusgroups.pdf))

- Conducting a survey within your own department. HSE have suggested and provided a survey toolkit online which may be useful ([http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/downloads.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/downloads.htm)).

- Staff representatives should be invited to be involved in these procedures.

Advantages/Disadvantages
The main advantage of any of these methods is that a much clearer picture of how your staff view workplace stress is obtained. The main disadvantage is that it is time and resource intensive. With the information obtained however you can list any relevant control measures and assign your rating of the risk as high, medium or low.

If considering focus groups or surveys, Occupational Health would strongly advise that you contact your local OH team to discuss the advantages/disadvantages in full.

SECTION 4
Consider the stressors and risk ratings in sections 1, 2 and/or 3 and decide on an overall risk rating for stress in the work area as low, medium or high.
Remember that if your assessment is Medium or High you must put together a plan to reduce that risk.

**ACTION PLAN**

In the ACTION PLAN, consider the following:

- what possible additional steps could be taken to reduce risk,
- what steps have been taken (this section can be updated as action is taken)
- any outcomes.

It is accepted that some possible actions may be resource constrained and not possible to implement but they can still be listed as possible actions. **This section is the most important to complete carefully.**

Finally, sign and date the assessment. Give a date for review.

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**Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Management Standards for Stress**

In November 2004 HSE published a series of six standards for management of stress. In general, the approach is the standard 5-step risk assessment: i) Look for the hazards; ii) decide who might be harmed and how; iii) evaluate the
risk and decide what needs to be done; iv) record your findings; v) monitor and review. In the case of stress, it is particularly important to consult with staff, identify problem areas, agree an action plan in partnership, and review the plan. See HSE guidance at [http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/)

The six specific standards are:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Standards</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1. Demands</strong></td>
<td>Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs</td>
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<td><strong>2. Control</strong></td>
<td>Employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Support</strong></td>
<td>Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Relationships</strong></td>
<td>Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. Role</strong></td>
<td>Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Change</strong></td>
<td>Employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In each case an additional standard is that “Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns”.

The standards are derived from the generic issues that can cause stress in the average workplace.