

'Putting the 'H' into Health and Safety'

Dr Jenny Lunt



Key Points

- Occupational health has played 'second fiddle' to safety for too long and needs to be re-prioritised with a focus on work-relevant rather than work-related health.
- Prevention is key. Rather than wait for an employee to become ill, become more pro-active and review the job's demands, controls, support, role, relationships. (See HSE Management Standards - <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards>.)
- Consider the key elements of a 'good job': training/support, communication and worker engagement, management commitment, reward/recognition, social connection .
- Management need to know their staff and be 'actively listening' for verbal and non-verbal signals e.g. observing changes in behaviour, making tentative and sensitive enquiries and agreeing actions. In all discussions, endeavour to remain neutral, objective, non-judgmental and consider the employee's perspective of the situation. Use open questions.
- Make the necessary adjustments, where practicable. Alter the work tasks to reduce demands - such as pace of work and task frequency, increase variety, have flexible working patterns, set achievable goals.
- Understand collective responsibility – two-way inter-dependency between employer and employee. Good health is good for business.
- Review organisational habits. Is there a 24/7 mentality and long hours culture which can be detrimental to employees' health?
- The owner of the risk, the organisation, is best placed to understand and manage/reduce that risk by putting in place appropriate interventions.