



## MANAGEMENT OF STRESS AT WORK POLICY

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This policy will be  
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biennially by the  
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Partnership  
Forum.

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**VERSION 2**

The provisions of this policy, which was developed by a partnership group on behalf of Grampian Area Partnership Forum, apply equally to all employees of NHS Grampian.

**NHS GRAMPIAN  
MANAGEMENT OF STRESS AT WORK POLICY**

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**This policy can also be made available, on request, in other formats e.g. in large print or on a computer disk.**

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# NHS GRAMPIAN MANAGEMENT OF STRESS AT WORK POLICY

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# **NHS GRAMPIAN MANAGEMENT OF STRESS AT WORK POLICY**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

It has long been recognised that jobs can strongly influence health in its physical forms. Working in dangerous conditions can increase the probability of sudden injury, long hours of continuous hard labour may lead to gradual physical deterioration, and extended exposure to dust, fumes or other toxic substances can give rise to specific physiological impairments. This policy provides for a proactive approach to managing stress at work, from an individual, team and organisational perspective. An accompanying “Stress Workbook” provides a practical framework for implementation of this policy.

The parallel effects of job conditions upon mental health have been examined only in recent decades, but important causal associations have already been established. It is also recognised that some factors out-with the workplace (for example, family problems, housing, and bereavement), contribute to the stress levels we experience.

There is widespread agreement that a primary indicator of good (or poor) mental health is the level and quality of a person’s “effective well being”. This includes feelings of happiness, satisfaction, high self-esteem, interest in work, interest in the environment and other positive emotions; or with anxiety, tension, depression, apathy, sense of hopelessness, and generalised feelings of distress. Statements about effective well being often refer to physiological as well as psychological processes, for example, anxiety being displayed in bodily tenseness, sweating, gastric disturbance or sleeping problems.

The associated costs of stress at work for any employer can be significant, resulting in long term staff absence, poor time keeping and work performance issues. This policy provides for a proactive approach in managing stress at work for NHS Grampian.

## **2. POLICY STATEMENT**

NHS Grampian is committed to dealing with the causes and effects of stress wherever it is possible to do so within NHS Grampian. This Policy describes ways in which the NHS Grampian can promote good mental health through a variety of interventions which enhance the overall objective of promoting and securing good mental health in the work place. This includes understanding and recognising when stress develops and the practical interventions that are available to help both staff and managers.

NHS Grampian encourages staff, staff side representatives and managers to: -

- Identify and assess the risks from possible work-related stressors for individuals, groups and teams
- Reduce identified stressors, including environment, work organisation, and people stressors, as far as is reasonably practicable
- Provide training and development, as a risk control measure, in areas of stress awareness, communication, time management, handling difficult situations, and employee relations as an integrated approach to managing people effectively
- Treat employees with stress in the same way as those with any other health problem
- Provide appropriate support for distressed employees
- Ensure appropriate rehabilitation of employees returning to work
- Monitor potential stressors within the organisation
- Train & develop staff to help identify & assess work-related stressors

### **3. SCOPE**

This policy applies to all staff in NHS Grampian no matter what their age, gender, ethnic origin, occupation, grade or hours of work.

### **4. POLICY AIMS**

This policy aims to:

- encourage staff wellbeing within NHS Grampian and discourage the stigma attached to stress or the use of the support mechanisms;
- raise awareness of ill-health associated with stress, its causes and associated factors, through information and education, encouraging everyone to recognise problems;
- change aspects of the workplace which have been identified (through local risk assessment) as increasing the stress risk;
- enhance the factors within NHS Grampian that reduce the risk of stress;

- educate staff in techniques for coping with pressure and stress;
- provide staff with help if they have mental or physical health problems associated with stress;
- provide systems of support and make sure they are well publicised;
- encourage staff to get help at an early stage; offering easy access to counselling and other professional help; ensuring there is confidentiality for those who want help (from whatever source);
- set up procedures for return to, and rehabilitation in work; and ensure that these procedures are flexible enough to meet varying needs.

## **5. RISK BASED APPROACH TO MANAGING STRESS**

Where stress cannot be eliminated at source, the risk based approach seeks to support staff as they strive to find innovative solutions to resolve negative impacts of stress in the workplace. The identification and control of possible causes of organisational stress is multi-faceted. It can relate to the way the organisation values and manages people particularly during times of change. NHS Grampian's Organisational Change Policy sets out the standards and procedures to be followed to effectively manage change. In essence, the organisation commits to providing a climate in which people have the confidence to seek assistance and discuss their work-related problems. In addition, the framework contained within the Stress at Work Handbook enables group risk assessments to be made using a Stress at Work Toolkit. The framework and process will be subject to continual audit (Staff Surveys, Risk Management Audit and Staff Governance Audit).

## **6. SAFE SYSTEMS OF WORK**

Where stress cannot be eliminated at source, then an action plan including safe systems of work must be developed and agreed to assist local managers and staff to manage the effects of stress in the service.

The Stress at Work Toolkit developed by NHS Grampian will offer a methodology to generate the action plan for hazards identified within your service. This will also act as the basis of your local risk assessment.

## **7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **7.1 Senior Managers/Managers**

Managers should encourage feedback from employees and ensure that individuals are treated fairly without ill effects to other colleagues.

Managers should ensure that risk assessments for stress are carried out for their workplace and that mental health issues are considered when assessing possible health hazards in the workplace.

Where a risk assessment shows that a problem exists remedial action should be taken. Managers and staff need to understand stress and take it seriously. Whilst staff have a role in identifying stress factors in the workplace and, where possible, taking action to control or eliminate them, managers are ideally placed to notice changes in how people work or interact with others. This may indicate when they are becoming stressed. Early action can prevent a problem becoming a serious health threat. The NHS “Staff Governance Standard” promotes a management style for NHS Grampian, which embraces the challenge of being supportive and developmental, and it is the responsibility of all managers to work towards this style.

Regular discussions can help in the recognition and reduction of any unnecessary demands placed upon employees as well as helping them and the team improve their ability to cope with pressure. Individual or group discussions provide an opportunity to discuss work commitments as well as any work related stress problems, but individuals should be encouraged to raise the problems with their manager, so that appropriate sources of help or support may be utilised. Discussion notes should be taken.

### **7.2 Individual Responsibilities**

Individuals should be aware that whilst it is probable that the stress they may feel is of a temporary nature, it is important that they recognise when it may be necessary to take corrective action. Certain self help strategies can be adopted. However, employees should talk to their line manager, contact their HR team or the Occupational Health Service - whichever route is felt to best meet the need.

All staff are responsible for:

- talking to their manager if there is a problem, or accessing OHS, HR or their Trade Union/Professional Organisation;
- supporting their colleagues if they are experiencing work-related stress and encouraging them to talk to their manager, OHS, HR or Trade Union/Professional Organisation;
- seeking support or counselling from OHS and/or the staff counselling service;

- speaking to their GP if worried about health issues;
- discussing with their manager whether it is possible to alter the job if necessary, to make it less stressful, recognising all team members' needs;
- trying to channel 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;
- recognising that stress is not a weakness;
- regularly pursuing opportunities to attend stress management courses; and
- being actively involved in the risk assessment process.

Individuals should take responsibility for creating a positive working environment and should use behaviour which contributes to this goal.

### **7.3 Trade Unions/Professional Organisations are responsible for:**

- investigating potential hazards and complaints from their members, receiving information they need from employers to protect members' health and safety;
- liaising with managers and staff to carry out risk assessments, including reviewing absence figures and linking these with other policies that may be available such as Dignity at Work; and encouraging members to use existing systems such as the Occurrence Recording System to bring problems to the attention of their Manager, so that there is evidence of any problems and that the organisation is aware of them.

### **7.4 HR is responsible for:**

- Providing confidential advice to members of staff on their terms and conditions, work patterns, job design and suggested approaches for tackling work issues which may be causing stress in the workplace.
- making sure that organisational policies and codes of conduct (professional and general) are adhered to;
- facilitating discussions within areas of conflict;
- monitoring staff conduct, attendance, turnover, etc.;

- advocating clarity of roles and responsibilities, advising on job descriptions and organisational structure; and
- promoting positive cultural change within the workforce.
- encouraging members to speak up as soon as they feel that their working environment is beginning to affect their health;

#### **7.5 OHS is responsible for:**

- advising managers and staff on occupational health;
- providing support for staff at all levels who may be experiencing the negative effects of stress; and
- providing confidential access to any individual to discuss problems that affect their ability to function, whether work-related or not.

### **8. EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

To deal positively with stress at the workplace, NHS Grampian 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;
- induction programmes for new staff (as stress education); and
- feedback from Staff Surveys, Staff Governance Audit and Risk Management Audit.

### **9. MONITORING AND LOCAL REVIEW OF IMPLEMENTATION**

The activities which result from the introduction of this policy will be examined and the activities of each component part monitored. This review process will lead to a regular revision of the policy.

As well as the policy itself, the risk-assessment process should be reviewed in light of any changes to work activities.

Regular evaluation of staff turnover, sickness absence and incidents will also contribute to the monitoring and reviewing of the policy.

## **10. POLICY REVIEW ARRANGEMENTS**

The Grampian Area Partnership Forum will review corporate progress in relation to the effectiveness of this Policy on a bi-annual basis. A copy of each review will be submitted annually to the Sector Risk Management Committees, Risk Management Network, Staff Governance Committee and their associated Partnership Committees.