

BRITISH HEART FOUNDATION HEART WEEK 2021



1. Has BHF seen an increase in the past year during CV-19 with heart conditions?

The British Heart Foundation saw calls to the helpline increase by 400% and 45% of all COVID death certificates mention Heart and Circulatory Disease as an underlying health issue.

2. As stress in the workplace is a contributing factor to heart disease, what do you think businesses could do more of to help with this?

Stress related illness is one of the most significant factors associated with absence from work. The Government of Jersey reports that approximately 9,000 working days are lost annually due to work related stress, an average of 44 days per claim.

Employers should learn to **spot the signs** of stress at work by taking a proactive approach in reducing stress:

- Defined role profiles (job descriptions)
- Regular 1-1's with line managers
- A people focused supportive and happy culture
- A learning culture instead of a blame culture
- Approachable and strong leadership
- SMART goals and effective communication

The motto 'look after your people and they will look after your businesses is certainly true'. If an employee feels supported, listened and cared about, work related stress is likely to reduce.

3. Do you think the increase in flexible working businesses are offering will help with this?

Recent surveys suggest that most people enjoy a flexible approach to working, either at home or work. We are all uniquely different, some people love working from home, others hate it. It all depends where you feel focused and where you work at your best.

During Covid-19, a majority of the working population (excluding front line and essential workers) were forced to work from home, whether they liked it or not. Business acted quickly to implement all the technological requirements needed to enable this, with an increase to resources required for people to do this.

I think it's fair to say that the '9-5' culture is one in which has increasingly become less and less over the year. 2020 could be seen as a trial period for colleagues and employers on assessing and evaluating both working from home and working hours.

All flexible working approaches should be considered carefully with appropriate risk assessments to ensure that the request made is the right one for the individual, looking at it holistically.

4. Do you think workplace wellbeing initiatives help employees? Does BHF have any data?

Wellbeing can mean many things to people and can overlap into engagement and motivation. However, all three of these subjects are very important in any organisation. Employers have a responsibility to maintain a positive environment, one in where staff want to be opposed to have to. Many initiatives are displayed in the workplaces today from; formal internal and external wellbeing programmes, reward and recognition initiatives, corporate social responsibly events, fruit Fridays, sports and social committee events, and the list goes on. However another key element in wellbeing is development, breakfast briefings and lunch and learns on topics outside of work keeps staff engaged and gives them a break from work, a time to stop, think, relax and breath – being in the moment.

Mental Health, understandably is an increasing topic for employers, wellness initiatives should be high on any business agenda, as the two go hand in hand. Employers should invest in the health and wellbeing of their staff and boost staff engagement, productivity and resilience. In turn, by supporting staff wellbeing makes businesses a great place to work resulting in; Improving employee health within a happier, more productive workforce. And it can even *save lives*.

The British Heart Foundation has great topics and advice on wellbeing at work as they continue to help fund lifesaving research into heart and circulatory diseases and their risk factors, such as high blood pressure or raised cholesterol.

Interesting facts:

- 1 in 4 UK adults have high blood pressure. How many of your staff know their blood pressure?
- Heart & circulatory diseases caused 460 deaths each day in the UK.
- There are over 30,000 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests in the UK each year.

Simply, wellness matters.

5. What do you think are the top stressful workplace issues cardiac patients worry about? I.e.: job security, returning to work, finding work, financial hardship, talking to their employer, etc.

Stress hits people in diverse ways, what may affect one person, may not affect someone else. However, workplace issues that are bound to affect cardiac patients are job security, as this will no doubt cause anxiety and possibly depression which may increase into heart and other complications.

During 2020 and 2021 there has been a high number of redundancies, closely linked to Covid-19 as a result. In November 2020, the Office for National Statistics stated that the redundancy rate reached a record high of 14.2 per thousand. As a result, potentially leaving families in financial hardship whilst trying to find alternative work – all which can cause unfortunate stress and further cardiac issues.

Finding work and attending interviews can be stressful for all of us, with plenty of people dreading interviews! However, for those with cardiac issues plus potential low confidence – this makes everything even more stressful.

We all have to jump through stressful obstacles at times, however, there are very useful resources, tips and advice on the BHF website and other resources, so in any stressful situation – ***you are not alone, we are in this together!***

6. How does data on workplace anxiety compare Jersey to UK? Is their data?

Reported in 2019, Islanders took over 106,000 days off due to stress, anxiety and depression, costing the government more than £3 million in incapacity allowance claims. Short Term Incapacity Allowance (STIA) claims for stress, anxiety and depression represented a total of 106,188 sick days in 2018, over 8,000 more than in 2014. Almost a quarter (22%) of adults scored their anxiety levels as high (six or more out of ten) in the 2018 Jersey Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, with 13% and 24% ranking their anxiety either medium or low. 41% of those surveyed reported feeling very low anxiety.

In the UK during 2019/20 there were an estimated 828,000 workers affected by work-related stress, depression or anxiety. This represents 2,440 per 100,000 workers and results in an estimated 17.9 million working days lost.

7. Although stress is always perceived as a bad thing, some people thrive on it. Is good leadership, communication and having good strong relationships with your employees now more important than ever?

Stress is certainly perceived as a bad thing, however, there will be many people like myself who certainly thrive off pressure, however, if not kept under control then this pressure can cause stress and other serious health issues. I have conducted two engagement surveys on island, and the two most important strategies that came out of both were Leadership and Communication. Both should complement each other, as if it doesn't then ***'Houston you have a problem'***! There are many diverse types of

leadership and what is perceived as 'Good' and 'Current' leadership. Without specifying any leadership styles, in my eyes, leaders should strive to be five things:

- Supportive
- Approachable
- Honest
- Caring
- Engaging

Communication is key, not only for employers, but equally for employees. A bottom up approach in any organisation is a culture where people feel valued, listened to and involved. People should feel empowered to speak up and know that they will be listened to with their employer being SUPPORTIVE, HONEST and ENGAGING.

Employers should be APPROACHABLE, a quick win for example is an 'open door policy'. This encourages communication, opposed to death by emails. We sometimes can forget how to 'effectively communicate' – but, being honest and speaking up at times where you may need support, advise or guidance should be the time that you should seek it.

Having a good working relationship with your colleagues and employers is very important. An environment where colleagues are APPROACHABLE, is an environment that is happier.

Covid-19 Lockdown has had a devastating impact on people's families, jobs and livelihoods. More than every is Leadership, Communication and Good Relationships even more important in today's society.

8. What would be your top three tips to any business to raise awareness of Heart Week 2021?

- **Know your numbers:** Hypertension means high blood pressure. An estimated 28 per cent of adults in the UK have high blood pressure – that's around 15 million people. But around half of them aren't receiving effective treatment. If left untreated, hypertension can increase your risk of heart attack or stroke. Unfortunately, there are few symptoms and it often goes undiagnosed. That's why some refer to it as a silent killer.

You can normally get your blood pressure checked at your GP surgery or now in some workplaces. Keep a diary of your readings and discuss them further with your GP or Practice Nurse.

- **Eat healthy:** Many of us are finding ourselves with more time on our hands since we've been in lockdown, so what better time to start adding some healthy and colourful recipes to your repertoire.

A healthy and well-balanced diet can help to reduce your risk of developing heart and circulatory diseases and stop you gaining weight, reducing your risk of type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure. The Mediterranean diet is a good place to start. It is typically rich in fruit and vegetables, beans and lentils, nuts and seeds, fish, including oily fish such as sardines, and wholegrain cereals, so aim to include more of these foods in your diet. To help get you started, the BHF has plenty of tasty recipes for you and the family.

- **Keep moving:** Regular physical activity can reduce the risk of developing heart and circulatory disease by up to 35%. You don't have to run a marathon or swim the Channel to see the benefits. Just 20 to 30 minutes of exercise every day, such a walk during your lunch break, can help make a difference.

Physical activity can reduce your risk of heart attack and stroke, control your weight, reduce your blood pressure and cholesterol levels and improve your mental health. If you don't know where to start, the BHF have virtual challenges like the [MyCycle](#) and [Step Challenge](#) to help get you moving, or you can take our quiz to see which activity suits you.

If you would like to talk to a qualified HR Now Consultant for ideas on how to support your employees, discuss flexible working requests, leadership training or any other HR related matters contact us hello@hrnow.ie

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