

A REVIEW OF MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR STAFF

March 2010



Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to summarise the activities that have and are currently being delivered to support staff mental health at Bangor University. This includes:

- Take-up rates by staff for external confidential counselling services
- Qualitative information from the provider of counselling services about the reasons for people accessing the service
- The impact of psychological illness on staff sickness absence levels
- A summary of measures that are being taken by the occupational health practitioner to support mental health.

Numbers of staff who have accessed external counselling services

Between 2006 and 2009 ‘University funded’, external and confidential counselling services to the staff at Bangor University were provided by MEDRA. In 2009 the provider changed to the ‘Network of Staff Supporters’ (NOSS).

Table1
The use of counselling services between
2006 - 2010

| | 2006 – 2007 | 2007-2008 | 2008 -2009 | 2009 - 2010 |
|---|-------------|-----------|------------|-------------|
| Total number of staff accessing the service | 27 | 28 | 42 | 42 |
| Numbers of people who said the cause of stress affecting work was work related only | 2 | 7 | 1 | 14 |
| Numbers of people who said the cause of stress affecting work was not work related | 15 | 12 | 20 | Not stated |
| Numbers of people who said their stress affecting work was caused by non- work and work reasons | 10 | 9 | 21 | Not stated |

Qualitative information from the provider of counselling services

The NOSS counselling report¹ states that 42 individuals were seen between 2009/2010 and of that number 14 people stated they needed to deal with workplace stress.

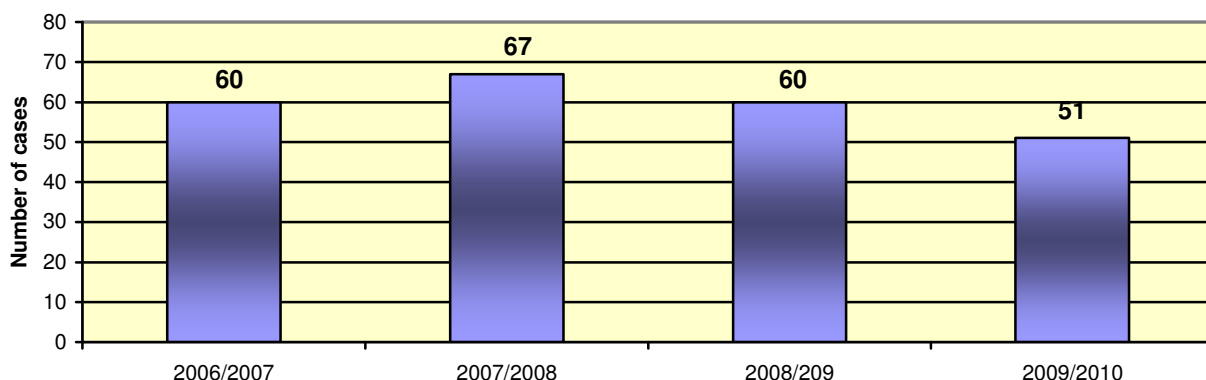
- Work related stress including reports of bullying are reported to be a common theme:
 - Triggers for work place stress include job insecurity and uneven work-loads
 - Triggers for bullying include poor work relationships with managers or poor working relationships with work colleagues.
- Other reasons for accessing the counselling service included stress at home, housing and debt issues or relationship difficulties with partners or bereavement.
- Some attendees suffered from diagnosed mental health problems. They were not receiving adequate mental health support from the NHS.
- Some individuals with diagnosed disorders accessed the counselling service because their underlying mental health issues made them vulnerable to workplace stress

¹ NOSS (2010) Report on the staff counselling service provided by NOSS Ltd c/o Human Resources

The impact of psychological illness on sickness absence levels

The timeframe for the use of counselling services has been applied to benchmark sickness absences due to psychological reasons. The limitation of measuring the impact on sickness absences levels is the fact that many people do not take sick leave. They continue at work. Nevertheless, absences due to psychological reasons do occur (chart 1) and the nature of severe mental health illness and treatment frequently results in absences that exceed 20 days per person

CHART 1
STAFF SICKNESS ABSENCE DUE TO PSYCHOLOGICAL REASONS



Measures taken to improve staff mental health

| Reactive | Proactive |
|--|---|
| Concerns about the adequacy of primary health service support to individuals with mental health issues have been raised by the occupational health practitioner (OHP) directly with General Practitioners on a named patient basis | Bangor University ‘Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice’ is an internationally respected programme of meditation to develop a positive outlook on life, with the aim of supporting rather than treating mental health. Over the past 18 mths 6 individuals have been sponsored by the OHP to attend this course with good effect. |
| To improve the success of mental health support a stress impact assessment of the effect of work on mental health and mental health on a person’s ability to work has been conducted on an ad-hoc basis. | In response to the staff health check programme a number of people expressed a wish to relax through lunchtime workplace yoga sessions. These were initially piloted in 2008 and repeated by a mixture of yoga teachers during 2009 and 2010 |
| To improve the understanding of work colleagues towards mental health issues, the OHP formed a working group that designed and delivered a workshop that achieved its goal to improve working relationships ² | Further staff workshops to improve the understanding of mental health issues amongst work colleagues are being planned in conjunction with NOSS. The OHP will continue to build relationships with local GPs to improve primary health team support networks |

Joe Patton
Occupational Health Practitioner
March 2010

² Patton, J (2010) *Report from the pilot mental health workshop* www.hss.bangor.ac.uk/documents