Mental Health At Work – How Can You Raise Awareness?

It has recently been reported that a third of all fit notes issued by GPs are for mental health issues. It is now the most common reason for absence ahead of musculoskeletal problems. The Royal College of Psychiatrists have said they found the findings alarming and have encouraged more to be done to get people back to work.

There was a 14% rise in notes directly relating to stress and anxiety between 2015 and 2017. The study which looked at 12 million fit notes over a two-and-a-half-year period found that half did not have a formal diagnosis. It is maybe not surprising to read that employees signed off for mental health problems were off sick for longer than those with other illnesses.

In response to these figures Rachel Suff of CIPD warned that technology could be a contributing factor to the rise in mental health cases. She states:

“The line between work and home has become more blurred over recent decades; technology can support flexible working, which can support better wellbeing, but it can also encourage a ‘never switching off’ culture.”

Healthy Working Lives suggest that employers can consider introducing the following measures to ensure that they are doing the best they can to help reduce the chance of mental health problems in their business;

- Introduce Flexible working options
- Have ‘Mental Health’ trained managers
- Raise awareness and create a culture to encourage open discussions about mental health issues
- Involve employees in decision making
- Implement mental health and wellbeing policies and procedures
- Introduce stress management procedures
- Provide access to employee assistance programmes and occupational health
- Have regular meetings with managers
- Introduce performance management processes
- Conduct return to work interviews

Empire can support you in introducing these measures and also can provide mental health awareness training for managers. Please call 01224 701383.

Empire this week raised over £100 for Mental Health Aberdeen, a charity that provides support services, counselling and advice to people of all ages in the north east of Scotland who have are affected by challenges related to mental health and wellbeing.

www.mha.uk.net
Ladder Standards Are Changing!

A new EN131 standard is being implemented by the European Union resulting in the current ladder standards changing on the 1st January 2018. The new standard will amend the current regulations and introduce a classification of use as either EN131 Non-Professional for domestic use and EN131 Professional which will be for commercial use. The intention of this change is to address the durability and stability of ladders.

There will be an as yet unspecified transition period to allow the introduction of the new standard, allowing manufacturers time to implement the changes within the standards to their new products. There is no need to change your existing ladders immediately as all ladders will remain legally compliant until they are deemed ready for replacement. It is important to ensure that your ladders are regularly inspected and fit for purpose.

The Health and Safety Executive state “Ladders can be used for work at height when a risk assessment has shown that using equipment offering a higher level of fall protection is not justified because of the low risk and short duration if use; or there are existing workplace features which cannot be altered”

When deciding to use a ladder in a certain situation, it is important to first consider the risk. It is not acceptable to use short duration as a deciding factor, for example at the expense of other potential risks.

You will need to be a competent person to use a ladder, and have had the instruction and understanding of how to use it safely. The user must understand and comply with the stated Maximum Vertical Static Load indicated on the label. Consult the manufacturer if in doubt.

The current classifications are;

Class III will be withdrawn and replaced with the new EN131 which will be split between Professional and Non Professional.

Empire can assist you with issues relating to Health and Safety. Please call 01224 701383
Ryanair – Holiday Shocker!

You will all have heard about the cancellation of Ryanair flights. Around 50-60 flights will be cancelled a day for the next six weeks as the Company deals with a backlog of pilot holidays. Despite the speculation surrounding how Ryanair found themselves in this situation, there are certain things that we do know and there are perhaps lessons for employers to draw.

The Company says that it “messed up the planning of pilot holidays” but reasons may go beyond poor holiday planning and suggest a serious staff shortage. It has been confirmed by rival airline Norwegian that it has taken 140 pilots from Ryanair already this year. Ryanair deny that staff shortages are the root cause of the issue and point to the change in the holiday year and the briefings they were getting from crew managers who are responsible for the rosters. In response to the loss of pilots they are offering new starts a €10,000 bonus on joining.

The Irish Aviation Authority demanded that by the end of 2017 Ryanair change their holiday year form April - March to January - December as this would keep them in line with the European regulator.

How can you prevent issues like this taking place in your business?

The most important thing to ensure is that you have clear annual leave policy and procedure that is clearly communicated to your employees.

Workers must take a minimum of 5.6 weeks (28 days’ holidays for full time workers) per year as stated by the Working Time Regulations. If it us up to individual managers to manage the holidays of their team they should be aware of who has days left to take and if possible, schedule holidays where the business has a lull in demand. It would also be possible, if you have a problem with staff taking their holidays to introduce fixed holidays where employees have no choice but to take time off when you decide or introduce ‘forced distribution’ where you demand that certain proportion of holidays is taken by a certain point in the year. It is important to note that as long as employees are taking their minimum 5.6 weeks annual leave, the employer can decide when and how they take it.

The focus on employee engagement over the last few years should have put good people management practices firmly on the employers’ agenda. You could have the best holiday management policy but if you find yourself with a sudden loss of staff due to a workforce that has limited loyalty, who don’t feel they are valued or properly rewarded, this could be costly for your business!

Empire can assist you with queries relating to annual leave and employee engagement.
Please call 01224 701383
Ask The Expert

This month HR and Employment Law Consultant Melanie Noble looks at the use of social media during recruitment.

Q: Can an employer investigate the social media profiles of a prospective employee during the recruitment process?

A: There is no specific prohibition on checking the social media profiles of candidates but there are risks associated with using social media for recruitment purposes. The main issue is the possibility of the employer discovering information about a candidate that could lead to inferences of discrimination if the candidate is subsequently unsuccessful. Even if the employer does not, in fact, discriminate, the fact that they have looked at the candidate's social media profile and therefore become aware of (or have a perception of) their age, ethnicity and (possibly) disability could put the employer on the back foot in defending such a claim.

The same is true if the employer uncovers the fact that the employee made a protected disclosure to a previous employer and acts on that fact, or if they discover that the employee is a trade union member. The employer should also consider whether exploration of an employee's social media profile is in breach of other policies.

To reduce the risk of such inferences, employers should:

- Consider using social media tools in background checks only after initial interviews, to minimise claims that hiring decisions were influenced by discriminatory factors (such as age or race) discovered in social media searches.
- Require verification of any information obtained on the internet before relying on it.
- Prohibit employees involved in recruitment from adding an applicant as a "friend" or otherwise connecting with an applicant via social media to investigate their background, to minimise the risk of data protection breaches.
Upcoming Events

Data Protection Changes

10th October – Inverness
12th October – Glasgow
25th October – Aberdeen

For more information and to book please click here