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Taking Care at Swansea Bay University Health Board

From 2018 to 2019, Performing Medicine, Swansea Bay University Health Board (SBUHB) and Swansea University collaborated on a pilot project aiming to improve staff wellbeing in the Mental Health and Learning Disabilities Unit at SBUHB. Workshops delivered by Performing Medicine were designed to help staff cope better with work-related stress, be more confident in their work, and engage with patients and colleagues in a more engaged and attentive way, and drew on skills identified in the Circle of Care framework - a tool created by Clod Ensemble's Performing Medicine programme, in collaboration with the Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust.

What We Achieved

- Reached 84 staff across three wards deemed to have high levels of working stress
- Delivered six full day workshops and six follow-up half day workshops three to four months later
- Collected participants' immediate reactions to workshops and subsequent attempts to change their behaviour, using both qualitative and quantitative measures

Key Impacts

Overall, the workshops were highly successful with most participants reporting both **increases in understanding** of the key themes of the workshop and **strong intentions** and **confidence** in making at least some changes as a consequence. Most felt that they would be supported in making those changes, both by their colleagues and managers. The majority of participants remained enthused about the workshops at the follow-up sessions some three to four months later, and many reported **meaningful behaviour change**.

The immediate feedback from the first day workshop was overwhelmingly positive:

- 98% of participants reported some degree of increased insight into at least one of the key themes of the workshop: the need for self-care, aspects of communication and behaviour and how their behaviour impacts on colleagues and patients.
- Most participants were positive in their intention to change each of the key behaviours addressed within the workshops, reporting at least moderately strong intention to change the ways that they communicate with colleagues (76%); take more care of their wellbeing at work (91%); consider their pace and posture with colleagues (76%).
- Most participants also felt confident that they were capable of making any changes they intended to make, reporting at least moderately strong confidence in the ways that they communicate with colleagues (76%); take more care of their wellbeing at work (91%); consider their pace and posture with colleagues (76%).
- Most participants were confident that they would receive support from colleagues, feeling at least 'very likely' to receive such support in changes to self-care (67%), developing communication skills (65%), and in working together to provide supportive care for patients (75%). Similarly they were confident that they would receive such support from managers, with most feeling at least 'very likely' to receive such support in changes to self-care (72%), developing communication skills (68%), and in working together to create a supportive work environment (76%).

70%

of participants reported at least “quite a bit” of change in their non-verbal behaviours

“The workshop gave me confidence to actually do something about managing my stress”

“I have found I am more understanding of other people’s behaviour”

“I’ve become more aware of my pace in work... slowing down to become more approachable”

- In textual comments following the workshops, the outcomes reported most frequently by participants were an increased awareness into the **importance of making time for self-care**, and **insight into how their own wellbeing, non-verbal behaviour, pace and posture affected other people**. Similarly, a number of respondents noted insight into taking more time during conversations, being more willing to listen to others, and to step back from responding too quickly.

Three to four months later, the majority of participants remained enthused about the workshops at the follow-up sessions, and many reported meaningful behaviour change:

- Most participants reported at least “quite a bit” of change in their non-verbal behaviours with patients (70%) and with colleagues (65%). The majority of participants reported feeling supported by their colleagues (86%) and managers (78%) at all levels in their attempts to change.
- Textual comments after the follow-up sessions provide evidence of change at all levels, from **ward managers making more time to spend with colleagues and supporting them in attempts to take more self-care**, to **ward staff taking more time to slow down and listen to patients and colleagues**. The greatest reported uptake on strategies considered in the workshops involved **taking time for self-care, and using specific stress management strategies such as breathing and mindfulness techniques**. A range of more patient-focused changes were also reported. Participant comments on the changes they have observed included:

“Started making small changes in work, taking a break, spending more time with people I manage. The biggest change has been how I view work affects my health: e.g. stress. The workshop gave me confidence to actually do something about managing my stress.”

“Went outside for break, for fresh air and exercise, stopped and taken a deep breath in before attempting another task.”

“Being more mindful in the moment, including patients care and situations with staff. To be more aware of feeling overwhelmed or anxious and take deep breaths and move on.”

“I make a conscious effort to stop what I am doing to listen to what my colleague may be telling. I am conscious of this as I have a habit of carrying on with work when a person is trying to talk to me. I am now very aware of this and try to stop it. I have found I am more understanding of other people’s behaviour – try not to get frustrated if a person finds things difficult to cope with.”

“It has helped a great deal in a way of looking at ourselves as well as our patients and to look at how we act and impact on patients. I appreciate this training session and feel it would be worthwhile if it had the “green light” and became compulsory training.”

“Since my last workshop I’ve become more aware of my pace in work and been more conscious in slowing down to become more approachable.”

The approach appears a realistic and applicable intervention even when wider institutional changes cannot be achieved, and one that could beneficially be rolled out to a wider professional audience.

This report is based on an independent evaluation undertaken by researchers at Swansea Bay University, led by Professor Paul Bennett. Copies of the full report are available upon request.