

# Briefing



ICAS WELLBEING

Autumn 2009 | [www.axa-icas.com](http://www.axa-icas.com)

## Why integration works best



The health resources and services provided by an organisation to manage the health and wellbeing of their employees are vitally important to the success of any business. Many organisations procure individual services with the expectation that they will deliver synchronous care. It is no wonder they become disappointed in the lack of synergy - simply bolting services together will not achieve the coordination required to manage health effectively.

Services provided from a single source ensures a continuity of care and a highly improved customer journey with the reassurance that employees cannot slip through support nets. Real knowledge and expertise are the keys to making it work.

Integration is more than just bolting together services. Integration is a coordinated interdisciplinary healthcare system ensuring effective treatment, at the appropriate time from the right professional in a cost effective manner.

Where care is multi-faceted the sharing of information ensures a collaborative approach that is seamless for the user. Physical illness, stress or inability to focus at work (or home) may be avoided through a single point of triage to the most appropriate level of care.

For example, an employee finding it hard to focus at work may be suffering from the effects of anxiety or depression, or a more severe mental health illness. As a result they may over-eat and under exercise. In turn, this could lead to problems with weight gain and other medical issues.

It is these issues that lead to presentation to the health services. Being able to refer this employee to a multi-disciplinary service the organisation can start to mitigate the physiological and psychological risks, whilst also helping the employee at an individual level.

Dealing with the underlying issue addresses the presenting symptoms. This employee needs a proper physical and mental health assessment, to eliminate any serious illness, and a care plan that helps them with their principal personal issues.

Essential to effective attendance management is a reliable absence recording system that can identify areas of concern and flag potential problems. Early identification of psychological and musculoskeletal issues is vital as these are the major contributors to long-term sickness absence, and are the conditions where the NHS has long waiting lists for treatment.

Prompt management referral to an integrated service provides immediate and appropriate access to psychological and physical assessment and support, through an employee assistance programme and fast track occupational health service. This leads to demonstrable business benefits through prompt resolution of employees' problems and early return to work.

Of course not all employees suffering from health issues - either physical or psychological - are absent from work so will not necessarily be subject to a

manager's referral. These employees need to have access to integrated health services through self-referral.

All organisations will benefit by focusing on the integration of seemingly stand alone specialist services, such as Employee Assistance Programmes, Occupational Health and Private Medical Insurance, and strengthening the natural linkages and referral pathways between them.

Individuals can be given the most appropriate intervention at the earliest opportunity and, almost as importantly, are aware that these services exist as a combined and coherent benefit.

It is now widely appreciated that poor employee health poses a serious risk to the future of a business. Organisations that spend time and effort on the management of the physical, in combination with the psychological, wellbeing of their employees will be those that come out of the recession the strongest.

**For more on Integrated Health Management call AXA ICAS on 0800 17 0800, email [sales@axa-icas.com](mailto:sales@axa-icas.com) or visit [www.axa-icas.com](http://www.axa-icas.com).**

### KEY BENEFITS . . .

- Early triage and intervention provides fast access to relevant experts getting your employees back to work and making a positive contribution as soon as possible
- Through the identification of hotspots, return to work improvements can be made whilst mitigating behavioural and organisational risk
- Account management across multiple services develops close cooperation and a better understanding of your organisation and culture
- Service integration can lead to increased workforce health efficiencies and cost containment
- More impactful management information showing a single view of employee utilisation across multiple support services

# From stress management to resilience

As the recession bites deeper and organisations look for ways to improve efficiency and cut back on costs, it is inevitable that employees are in the front line as the pressure begins to rise. The wellbeing of employees has a direct impact upon the wellbeing of the organisation itself.

Organisations can do much to prevent unnecessary pressures taking their toll on the workforce. Support mechanisms that can be put in place to help employees through these turbulent times include an EAP, an Occupational

Health Service and managers who are able to identify and support those who may be affected by the increased pressure.

Even with the best support available, dealing with the challenges of working in the current recessionary environment can often depend on how well the individual is equipped to deal with those pressures for themselves.

Research from a variety of sources has identified a number of key characteristics that enable people to be resilient in the face of adversity.

### 1. Emotional intelligence

Being aware of your feelings and, more importantly being capable of regulating your emotions so that you, rather than your feelings, are in the driving seat.

This process involves you actively monitoring the thoughts behind your feelings to be able to act upon them to create a new, more effective emotional response. This is the basis for much cognitive behavioural psychology.

### 2. Self-control

The ability to manage uncertainty and to delay the desire to act immediately or impulsively. Assessing the situation and weighing up the options before taking action.

### 3. Balanced optimism

Retaining a realistically optimistic outlook on life enables you to handle setbacks and pressure better than those who default to pessimism. In some circumstances a degree of pessimism may act as a useful reality check.

However, in most situations, maintaining a positive and optimistic frame of mind is beneficial and can often contribute to creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Some experts on resilience regard this characteristic as the most important of all.

### 4. Problem analysis

Analysing problems in a logical and unemotional manner helps to accurately identify the causes of the problem, and think of alternative realistic and practical solutions for those issues.

### 5. Empathy

The ability to recognise and interpret other people's verbal sub-texts and non-verbal mannerisms can provide important clues as to their emotional and psychological state.

This is an extremely useful communication skill - invaluable in developing and maintaining relationships, providing essential support when facing adversity.

### 6. Self-belief

Self-belief and self-confidence are important tools in meeting many of the challenges that life can throw at us. A belief in your own abilities to deal with problems is often a major factor in determining the final outcomes.

### 7. Risk-taking

Being resilient also involves the ability to step outside one's 'comfort zone' and take some calculated risks. If you place limits on yourself then you will be less likely to achieve personal growth from the challenges and difficulties that you face. Resilient people are more likely to try new ways, accepting that failure is a learning process rather than a pre-ordained certainty.

### 8. Physical fitness

The link between the body and the mind can sometimes be forgotten. Paying attention to your diet, exercise levels, relaxation routines and sleeping patterns enables you to maintain a level of physical fitness that enhances your mental fitness.

These characteristics can be especially important in the current economic climate, as more and more people have to come to terms with major changes to their employment and their way of life.

Some people seem to have a natural ability in many, if not all, of these areas. The good news is that people can be helped to develop these characteristics themselves through training and coaching.

Organisations who invest in developing a resilient workforce will emerge from the downturn better placed than their competitors who have chosen to do nothing.

AXA ICAS Specialist Services offer a variety of training courses for managers and employees on how to deal with pressure proactively, and develop the skills required to be resilient in the face of adversity.

**For more information about our training courses call AXA ICAS on 0800 17 0800, email [sales@axa-icas.com](mailto:sales@axa-icas.com) or visit [www.axa-icas.com](http://www.axa-icas.com).**

## KEY POINTS . . .

- Manage your emotions so you remain firmly in the driving seat
- Assess the situation before taking action
- Be optimistic - it often creates a self-fulfilling prophecy
- Adopt a logical approach to problem solving
- Empathise
- Believe in yourself
- Calculated risk taking is good
- Physical fitness enhances mental fitness

# Beyond contingency:

## preparing for the psychological impact of swine flu fear

The media focus on swine flu in the workplace has been on business contingency plans and absence management procedures. If you haven't done so already, now is the time to look beyond this to identify the steps you should take to mitigate the psychological impact on work and business performance.

Anxiety and stress is likely to increase with the anticipated second wave of swine flu. Parents will worry about their children, employees will be anxious about the financial and wellbeing risks of catching the virus, while managers will be concerned about the impact of staff needing time off sick or to care for others who are. All of this will have a significant impact on staff's performance at work and business continuity.

Mandy Rutter, Clinical Manager at AXA ICAS, is a leading expert on trauma management, leadership/behaviours in a crisis and developing resilience to crisis situations. She suggests that organisations and managers consider the following:

- Processes need to be in place to support managers in the shift from managing objectives, targets and finances to monitoring illness, possible death and huge levels of anxiety among their team. For example, schools will no longer close in swine flu 'hot spots'. Consider the implications that this could have on parents in terms of anxiety and concern. Are any staff concerned about work closures and the impact it could have on finances?
- Working at home in theory is the ideal answer. But people go to work to do more than just earn money. They go to connect and communicate. To feel good about themselves. How much can this be carried on in the isolated confines of the home?
- Managers need to actually ask staff about their family commitments, to gain an understanding of their support network at home should one of their children or their partner become ill. With two working adults in a household, whose job takes priority under pandemic flu situations? Basic assumptions about priorities, health, family life and routines may all be disrupted which will immediately cause staff to re-evaluate their lives.
- By having these open and frank discussions with staff now, in relative calm, managers and organisations have time to apply a more thoughtful and less anxious plan for managing the worst.

For more details on **CRISIScal®**, a service designed to help companies prepare and recover from incidents or traumas, call AXA ICAS on 0800 17 0800, email [sales@axa-icas.com](mailto:sales@axa-icas.com) or visit [www.axa-icas.com](http://www.axa-icas.com).



## TOP TIPS . . .

Effective sickness absence management can have a measurable impact on business performance and the bottom line. Here are five of our top ten tips for managing sickness absence.



### 1. Assess the current position

It's an old adage that you can't manage what you don't measure and nowhere is this more true than in employee absence. So, firstly ask yourself the following:

- Is your sickness absence recording regime accurate?
- Do you have an acceptable rate of sickness absence?
- Do you know the actual cost of sickness absence to your business?
- Does your management information identify absence hotspots?
- Is management information readily and easily accessible for those who need it?
- Is absence managed consistently across all departments and/or locations?

### 2. Set clear targets and objectives

Once you have good sickness absence 'intelligence' you need to identify your overall priorities and objectives. Setting target rates for absence improvement over, say, 12 months is important. Also include other success criteria such as reviewing all current long term absentees and conducting and recording return to work interviews after all absences.

### 3. Review your absence policy and procedures

Make sure that your absence policy is up to date and fits your overall business and operational strategy. Ensure that you have clear trigger points for managers to take action, for example to identify employees with frequent short term absences. Communicate your absence policy to all staff and ensure that it is followed consistently across your business.

### 4. Lead from the top

We strongly recommend that a senior person takes ownership of the issue and is seen to be doing so. This person - if not a Board member - should provide regular updates on performance to senior management and act as an attendance champion to help motivate and inspire junior management.

### 5. Involve all stakeholders

Ensure all stakeholders - employees, unions and other representatives, managers, health and safety representatives and occupational health professionals - understand that high levels of attendance is crucial to company success. The business is - and therefore jobs are - more secure if your organisation is running at optimum efficiency.

### 6. Contact us

For a full copy of our top tips, including the remaining five from the list above, call AXA ICAS on 0800 17 0800, email [sales@axa-icas.com](mailto:sales@axa-icas.com) or visit [www.axa-icas.com](http://www.axa-icas.com).

# What the Dickins?



Recent case law has made it essential for employers to take a more proactive approach to managing stress in the workplace.

A judgment made last October by the Court of Appeal in the case of Dickins v O2 plc has arguably made it easier for employees to claim successfully against their employer for psychiatric injuries caused by occupational stress.

Employers were not previously considered liable for all damages relating to personal injury resulting from an employee's breakdown and the burden of proof was on the employee. This ruling now means that the employee has only to prove a minimal contribution by an employer to their breakdown, and all of the damages would be liable by the employer.

Dickins worked in a clerical role including quarterly auditing that had caused her some considerable stress that she complained about. She had been regularly late for work and had told her line manager she didn't know how long she could keep going for. She asked for a change in role and as there were no vacancies available she asked for a six month sabbatical.

She was referred to the counselling helpline, and one month later to occupational health. Before she reached the occupational health appointment she suffered a breakdown.

In the case of Hatton v Sutherland a referral to counselling was seen as sufficient, and this was supported

by other subsequent cases. The fact that O2 referred the claimant to its confidential counselling helpline was not considered adequate by the court to meet its duty of care.

The court also concluded that, because she had previously complained of severe stress, the company should have used managerial intervention to send her home, pending an urgent investigation by occupational health - even though she hadn't been signed off sick by her GP.

### Far reaching implications

Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) should not be considered a low cost tick-in-the-box commodity. Managers need to be vigilant in looking for early signs of stress, and act upon their observations. They should proactively use the EAP service to seek support and talk through challenging people management issues.

Simply referring severely stressed employees to an EAP may no longer be sufficient in isolation. It may need to be accompanied by further management intervention, such as urgent referral to occupational health, reasonable adjustments to work, or preventing employees from working until further investigations are completed.

**For more information on occupational health and managing stress and absence, call AXA ICAS on 0800 17 0800, email [sales@axa-icas.com](mailto:sales@axa-icas.com) or visit [www.axa-icas.com](http://www.axa-icas.com).**

## Dates for your diary

### Back Care Awareness Week

10 -16th October 2009

This year's Back Care Awareness Week will focus on back care at work, and aims to inform and guide people on how to manage and prevent back pain in various working environments.

### Breast Cancer Month

October 2009

Throughout this month, Breast Cancer Care aims to inform people about breast cancer, and to teach individuals to become breast aware.

### National Stress Awareness Day

Wednesday 4th November 2009

Stress can be an insidious build up of many pressures and challenges. Most people are now aware that the big issues in life can be exciting for some and too demanding for others, resulting in stress - redundancy and moving home are just two examples. This year's campaign is 'Stressing the Positives'.

### CIPD Conference and Exhibition

17th -19th November 2009

AXA ICAS will be exhibiting at this year's exhibition in Manchester. Visit our stand to learn more about how our integrated health and wellbeing services can support your organisation.

**Visit [www.axa-icas.com/events](http://www.axa-icas.com/events) for details of forthcoming AXA ICAS events**

## Occupational Health Awards 2009



AXA ICAS are proud to be sponsoring this year's awards.

Taking place on December 8th 2009 at the Landmark Hotel in London, the Awards celebrate the outstanding achievements of practitioners in work and health in organisations of all sizes.

Winners in 2008 included Metropolitan Police Services (for Mental Health and Stress Management) and United Biscuits (for Intervention for Musculoskeletal Disorders)

**See [www.occupationalhealthaward.com](http://www.occupationalhealthaward.com) for details of this year's event.**