



Free website gives line managers help in tackling absence

MADELEINE DAVIES



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Line managers will be able to find out how effective they are at tackling stress among employees on a new website launched by the Health Safety Executive (HSE).

The self test asks line managers 66 questions exploring issues from whether they show humour at work to their ability to make decisions. Completing these generates scores in each of the four competencies for stress management, identifying where managers need to make improvements. Visitors to the site are encouraged to focus on their worst performing areas and discuss them with employees before working to change their behaviour. Suggestions include seeking HR support or undertaking formal mentoring or a training course.

The HSE requires every employer to conduct risk assessments for health and safety hazards, including work-related stress. Several studies have identified the need for greater support for line managers tasked with tackling stress and other mental health conditions.

Managers interviewed as part of the Mental Health Foundation's "Returning to work" research reported receiving little training and support to facilitate employees' return to work. Many did not know when to contact the employee on sick leave and what to say them. As a result, participants felt that many line managers did not provide any positive support or guidance.

Eugene Farrell, business manager at AXA ICAS welcomed the website.

He said: "Line managers are right in the middle of this [stress management]; it's coming from subordinates and from above. For the most part in the UK managers are not well-trained, let alone in stress and absence management. Line managers need training and this particular tool is another useful way to address that."

In 2007/08 a total of 13.5 million working days were lost to work-related stress, depression and anxiety. Each case of work-related stress, depression or anxiety related ill health leads to an average of 30.6 working days lost, accounting for over a third of all new incidences of ill health.