

## Recognising signs of mental health problems in staff

Sometimes a person's behavior becomes noticeable, "out of the blue", that's how it often begins. Small changes in a person's behavior appear and become recognized by those around them. It's when colleagues and managers get a feeling that "something is not quite right or odd" about the behavior, feelings or ways of thinking compared to a while back. We always think mental health problems and illness "happen to others" and are a rarity. In fact, they are more widespread, common and sometimes unforeseen by people.

### What is Mental Health?

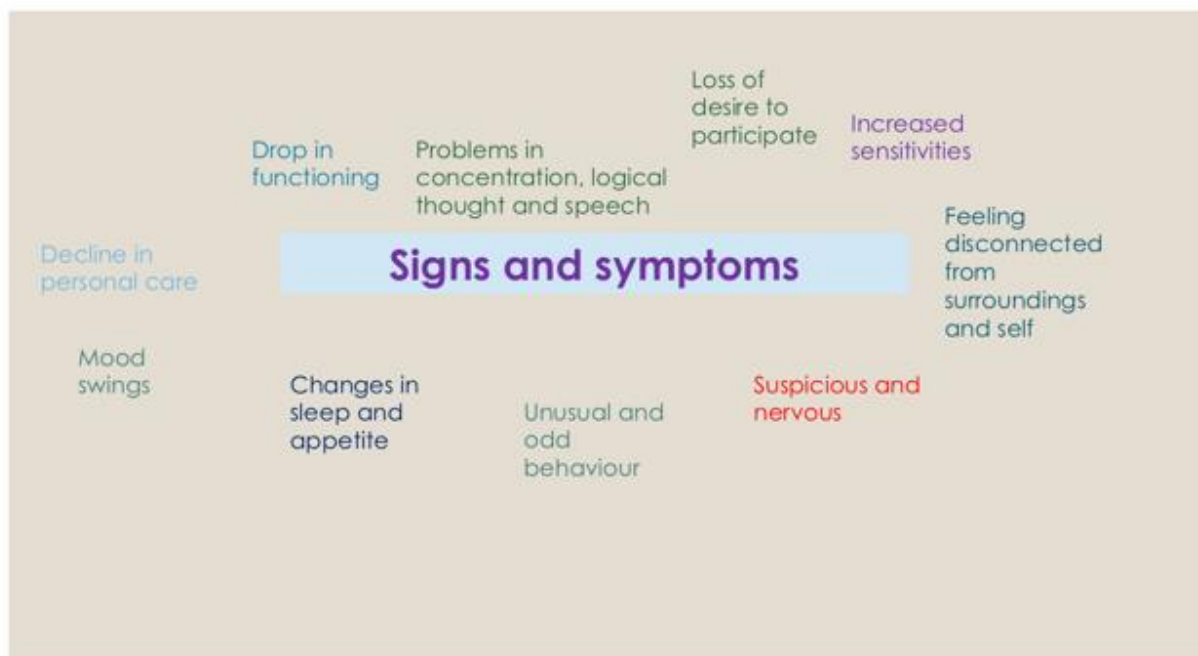
A psychological state in which every individual realizes her or his own potential, copes with the normal stresses of life, works productively and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. (WHO, 2014)

### Wellbeing

Refers to the condition of an individual or group – career, social, financial, physical and psychological and community (based on Gallup). It is achieved by a healthy working and living by the practice of health-enhancing behaviors, e.g. prioritizing workload, good nutrition, adequate sleep etc. It implies the presence of the physical, emotional and mental capacity to make healthy choices. At a systems level, this refers to encouraging practices consistent with supporting, improving, maintaining and/or enhancing health. (Adapted from the Public Health Agency of Canada, 2017)

### Recognizing the signs

Mental health problems and illnesses can cause disturbances from mild to severe in several areas of functioning. There are more than 200 classified forms of mental illness, some more common than others. They may be related to stress due to a particular situation or series of events.



## Signs and Symptoms

It is also worth using these scales to help you decide if the person needs help (professional or managerial):

*a) How many signs is the person displaying?*

1.....5.....10 plus

*b) How long has the person been demonstrating these signs?*

One week.....30 days plus

*c) What is the impact on the person?*

Minimal.....Massive

*d) What is the impact on significant others, e.g. colleagues?*

### Colleagues and counterparts

Minimal.....Massive

### Family (if known)

Minimal.....Massive

*e) What is the level of risk for the person?*

Minimal.....Massive

*f) What is the level of risk for the organization?*

Minimal.....Massive

*h) To what extent does the person recognize that they need professional help?*

No recognition.....Have asked for help

It is risky to decide that a person has a mental health issue because they have a bad day or even week. However, if some of the behaviors mentioned above are present over a consistent period of time and adversely impact a person's functioning (at work or socially), then it is best to seek advice from a mental health care professional. Professional help should be ensured and urgently made available when we believe that a person is a danger to themselves, others or are unable to meet their basic needs.

## Support

It is important that the person affected acknowledges that they need help. For example, you could encourage them to accept the warning signs, not worry about stigma or wonder what caused them to become ill; accept that these feelings are normal and common. They could try to establish their own

support network, this can come from family members, friends or colleagues. Therapy can be beneficial for all (individuals and their family) to adapt and get through situations. It will take time for them to get accustomed, but in the end, they will be glad they asked for help.

If, however, the person does not accept or acknowledge that they need help, then it is vital to let them know that you will talk to a mental health professional about how to help the person. This can include talking to Staff Welfare or OHU.

Strategies to help manage stress, build resilience and promote mental wellbeing:

- Listen and connect
- Create a culture of openness so staff can come and talk to you freely
- Give time, words and presence
- Avoid early conclusions that someone has mental health problems
- Check with a mental health professional
- Remember that mental health and mental illness is accepted differently in each country



Once the person has received the professional support, advice and therapeutic help they need, they will require our help to return to work. The intention is to help the person to work so that they better understand their mental health issues and that those around them know how to positively support them. A recovery plan is usually developed to help them develop their wellbeing.

## References

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