

EXPOSURE TO TRAUMA AT WORK

INFORMATION FOR ADMINISTRATION WORKERS

Health and Community Services Union members work in some of the toughest workplace environments in the country. Every day in the mental health sector, staff are faced with experiences of cumulative and vicarious trauma. We've put together this fact sheet to help Admin Workers to:

- Be safe at work and home;
- Prevent injury, illness and disease;
- Promote health and lead a happy, fulfilling life.

Throughout the mental health sector, a range of administration and support staff work; these staff may be exposed to confronting things in the course of their work. Reception, Health Information or support staff, for instance, may read about, hear and, at times, witness traumatic incidents. It is important to acknowledge how this exposure can impact you and ensure you know where to get help should you need it. Managing such risks form an important part of standard Occupational Health & Safety (OHS) employer obligations.


Repeated exposure to the disturbing life events of other people including the often-traumatic experiences of our consumers can have an emotional and psychological impact on clinicians and administration staff. Similarly, exposure to traumatic events and other emotionally disturbing information in the capacity of one's job can impact on your health.

You may already use a range of strategies to manage these challenging aspects of your work. However, this information may serve as a reminder to look out for a fellow colleagues who may be struggling. It is likely that at some stage in your career working in mental health, exposure to the traumatic stories of others will have a negative impact on your own wellbeing. It is important to recognise the signs and symptoms that this exposure may cause¹. Identifying the warning signs of exposure to trauma, reducing the risks where possible, and managing the potential health impacts are vital for one's health.

Signs and symptoms can include;

- Difficulty sleeping;
- Increased anxiety;
- Difficulties concentrating or experiencing a more negative view of the world;
- Increase alcohol, drug or medication use;
- Increased fear of safety or danger for self or others;
- Feeling that you can't discuss work with family or friends, or feeling that you can't stop talking about work;
- Reluctance do things you normally enjoy

¹ *Signs and symptoms of vicarious traumatisation (Saakvitne et al., 2000).*

CALL 1300 651 931 **FAX** 03 9650 8122 **EMAIL** hacsu@hacsu.asn.au **MAIL** PO Box 206 Carlton VIC 3053
WEB www.hacsu.asn.au **FAX** 03 9650 8122  facebook.com/hacsu

AUTHORISED BY LLOYD WILLIAMS, STATE SECRETARY

Managing stress and vicarious trauma

A healthy balance of work, rest, play, including socialisation with friends and family is important in decreasing the effects of exposure to trauma².

Strategies include:

- Discussing work-related issues with a colleague, line manager, or, if necessary, seek debriefing with an Employee Assistance Service counsellor or speak to your family GP or Doctor;
- Caring for yourself;
- Relaxation and mindfulness strategies;
- Using regular physical activity and recreation to help dissipate stress;
- Avoiding the use of alcohol and drugs as a way of coping;
- Undergoing training and workshops about reducing the effects of exposure to trauma;
- Taking lunch breaks away from your desk or working space, in order to clear your mind;
- Talk to your Union Delegate or Organiser.

Key Contact Numbers

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636

MensLine Australia: 1300 789 978

Remember!

Acknowledging when you are not coping and seeking help is not a sign of weakness, it's the first step to a healthier workplace for everyone.!

Knowledge is power. Keep your colleagues informed by printing this newsletter to put up on your workplace noticeboard.

² <https://www.blueknot.org.au/Workers-Practitioners/For-Health-Professionals/Resources-for-Health-Professionals/Vicarious-Traumatization>