

# Mental Health: The Words Global HR & Corporate Travel Professionals Can't Ignore

The 'always on' society, economic and job uncertainty, social media and the influence of the media, and rising expectations of employers of what life should be like are all contributing to the growth in mental health issues.

On the rise since the early 1990's, undoubtedly some of it is because people are more willing to report and admit mental health problems.

## Mental Health: The Numbers

Mental health issues, such as stress, depression and anxiety, account for almost 70 million days off sick per year - more than any other health condition - costing the UK economy alone £70-£100 billion per year. 49% of work absences occur due to stress-related illnesses, and the annual cost of people underperforming at work because of poor mental health is estimated at £15.1 billion, or £605 per employee in the UK. In addition, 12.5 million working days were lost to work-related stress in 2016-17, and almost one-third (31%) of UK employees said they would consider leaving their current role within the next 12 months if stress levels in their organisation did not improve.

The UK Government is committing a £2 billion GBP funding boost to tackle mental health, and forward thinking businesses like Lloyds Bank's recent #GetTheInsideOut media campaign should very much be applauded for placing a spotlight more from a help-others perspective. Many employers are taking more steps to address mental health issues in the workplace, but there is some way to go.

## The Mobile Workforce

Matthew Holman, founder of Simpila Healthy Solutions, a consultancy that addresses mental health issues in the workplace says UK industry needs to pay more attention to its mobile workforce. Stress impacts an employee's wellbeing and has considerable financial implications for businesses. It pays to keep tabs on business travellers' wellbeing. Holman has devised a straightforward, anonymous, ten-question

Business Travel & Mental Health Survey that explores the mental health of business travellers. So far, its respondents have flagged up some worrying issues, most notably:

- 49% of respondents have either been diagnosed with, or have shown symptoms of, mental illness
- Of those who have/had a mental illness, 63% suffered with depression, 44% with an anxiety disorder and 29% with stress
- 80% of those who have/had mental health problems have not told their employer
- 74% of the companies represented do not have a travel policy that includes supporting mental health.

Source: *Buying Business Travel*

There are many business travellers who feel they are constantly 'on duty' answering the telephone and emails at all times in their day, working long hours with no definitive 'work-timed' existence. This coupled with limited human interaction and lonely nights in serviced apartments can have a major impact not only on their mental wellbeing but those of their family, friends and other people around them. On the move, they are regularly concerned about rush-hour traffic on the way to the airport, check-in times at both the airport and their destination accommodation. They can also experience long periods of inertia on the flight, drinking and eating to excess (because it's often free on the flight, in the lounges and at the conferences they attend), jetlag, poor sleep patterns, feelings of isolation and loneliness, and the numerous issues of dealing with clients and colleagues in different time zones.

## What Are The Indicators For Identifying Mental Health Issues And Depression In An Employee?

Not hitting deadlines, missing meetings, poor concentration, emotional outbursts and heightened irritability, restlessness, sleep issues, social withdrawal, excessive alcohol consumption and loss of interest in tasks are all signs.

## What Can Corporate Travel Managers Do To Address The Issue Of Burn Out And Facilitate A More Productive

## Mindset, In Addition To The Duty Of Care And Where The Employee Is?

The image of the 'road warrior stiff upper lip' attitude needs disseminating within organisations and more attention paid to employees' wellbeing.

More corporate travel managers are introducing wellbeing programmes within their travel policy and encouraging their employees to take ownership for how to go about doing their job without feeling they will be judged or reprimanded. To connect with their loved ones more and to resist the temptation to go on a conference call straight after a business trip. Taking the afternoon off and taking the time in lieu for 'bleisure' activities and 'non-work experiences' are also being introduced to 'break up' trips abroad.

Companies should be able to identify those who are living with stress or mental health conditions with accredited Mental Health First Aiders who are equipped to support HR and their responsibility with employees, which offers a more holistic insight into their wellbeing, allowing HR to collaborate better with corporate travel managers.



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