

# Helping Your Employees to Improve Their Health

## Planning a Programme

### 1. Identify a person - or group or committee - who will put the health promotion programme into action

They will need to be given time to do it. Just adding it on to all their current responsibilities means it will not get done.

### 2. Allocate a budget for health promotion activities

A health promotion programme does not have to be very expensive. Many health promotion activities can be fitted in around existing work patterns. The people responsible for implementing the activities will need the time and resources to do this and may need some extra staff support for this or to cover the rest of their work. In a large workplace it may be appropriate to train volunteers to run health groups and activities, which has resource implications for covering part of their ordinary work.

### 3. Assess health needs

The best start is to make an assessment of needs for the whole workforce (*\*see 'Needs Assessment' below*). This assessment should be in line with a broad view of 'health at work', covering health and safety, occupational health as well as health promotion. In a large workplace it may be appropriate to do this through representatives. In a smaller workplace it may be possible to get everyone's views. Either way, surveys and discussions amongst small groups ('focus groups') can be a good way of finding out what people want and what should be prioritised.

#### \*Needs Assessment

1. Data on main reasons for sickness absence especially illness or disability lasting eight days or longer (certified sickness); major causes of death of employees.
2. Can these data be related to particular groups (sections, departments, jobs, pay bands, men, women, etc), who could then be targeted?
3. Description of existing health promotion resources and activities, and what use is made of these.
4. Survey of all managers and employees and/or
5. Survey of (some) managers, medical/occupational health staff, employee relations/human resources/personnel staff, trade union representatives, together with agenda item at negotiating and health and safety committees. The responses would be based on their assessment of what they think staff / union members want and need.

The surveys would aim to discover:

- factors in the workplace which employees and managers think affect health
  - suggestions for activities
  - priorities for action
  - anything already being done which should be encouraged, extended, or amended.
6. Focus groups of random groups of staff to explore their suggestions and priorities.
  7. Suggestion boxes where any staff can contribute ideas.

### 4. Develop a health at work strategy

Initial planning of a broad health at work strategy is best done through existing structures, such as a consultation and negotiating committee, works council, or health and safety committee. Consideration should be given to how good employment and management practices can complement more specific health promotion issues and topics. Once the overall plan is established, smaller working groups can discuss the details, and report back to the full committee.

## **5. Identify priorities and timescale**

It is not possible to do everything at once, so after the needs assessment has been done, and the overall strategy has been agreed, it is necessary to work out a programme of activities and to decide on priorities and a timescale. This should include target dates by which different activities will be started or completed. In terms of health promotion, there are certain health topics which are likely to be more popular, such as, heart disease, cancers, and stress. The best practice is to fit health promotion and ill-health prevention activities into people's working lives, rather than seeing these as medical problems just for individual testing and treatment.

## **6. Work on a few ideas to start with**

### *Help to Stop Smoking*

As well as restricting smoking, employers can offer to help their employees to stop smoking, for example, by offering access to individual counselling or stop smoking groups.

### *Healthier Food Choices*

Most large workplaces provide a canteen, and even small workplaces may have some sort of food provision, such as vending machines. These give an opportunity to offer healthy choices, perhaps at subsidised prices, and to encourage employees to think about what they eat. Making small changes (such as reductions in fat, salt or sugar) to best selling dishes can be effective in promoting healthier choices. If there is no canteen, it might be possible to negotiate with local sandwich shops and cafes to encourage them to offer healthy options, if they know there are guaranteed customers.

### *Encouraging Physical Activity*

Although most workplaces will not be able to provide a gym or running track, they can encourage employees to walk or cycle to work, especially if they provide showers and changing facilities. Measured local routes around the workplace or the neighbourhood can encourage staff to take a short walk during breaks. If staff use the stairs rather than lifts this can count as part of the recommended amount of activity in a week. 'Keep fit', yoga or tai chi sessions can be organised at lunch breaks or before or after work. Some employers allow their staff some paid time off to enable them to take up healthy activities, or to arrive a bit later or leave a bit earlier if they walk or cycle to work.

## **7. Make the health promotion programme part of a health at work strategy in the company business plan**

The aim would be to show how health promotion activities have been linked with health and safety management and good employment practices, and what impact it is estimated this has had on sickness absence, accident and injury rates, staff turnover and staff morale. There are a number of ways this can be done, including:

The Chief Executive or Managing Director, or each Departmental Manager or Section Head, can have health at work activities as part of their performance objectives.

Monitoring and review of health at work activities can be included in the company's Annual Report.

A Health at Work group can report annually to the company board.

## **8. Develop health at work policies and procedures**

Many workplaces already have smoking policies, which restrict smoking to certain areas, or ban it completely. Many also have procedures for dealing with employees with problems related to alcohol or substance use. Such policies and procedures are not always formally agreed or written down, which can lead to lack of consistency or charges of unfairness. Policies and procedures on specific topics work best when part of an overall framework of promoting health at work, and they are more likely to be effective if they are developed through accepted consultation and negotiation structures.

It is important to make clear how the health at work policies and procedures fit together with and complement other company policies, such as training in health and safety, personal development, personnel and employee relations.

## **9. Publicise the health promotion activities**

Using the company's existing communication channels rather than setting up an elaborate new system is the easiest way. Just as with marketing of any product, it's a good idea to have a distinctive, unifying logo or title for the whole programme. It's also useful to have known, standard places where information is

available on what's going on (such as: staff room, specific noticeboard, medical centre, personnel department, trade union office, toilets/washrooms). New staff can be informed at induction sessions, and all staff can be regularly up-dated by staff meetings, in-house magazine, staff handbook and individual supervision sessions.

#### **10. Workplace activities and campaigns can be linked to national events**

Linking local activities and campaigns to national ones, such as No Smoking Day (second Wednesday in March), Workers Memorial Day (28<sup>th</sup> April), World Mental Health Day (10<sup>th</sup> October), Breast Cancer Awareness Month (October), World AIDS Day (1<sup>st</sup> December) can encourage employees to get involved. It also means there are ready made publicity materials available.

#### **11. Collect information to monitor activities**

Information should be collected on what has been done and when; how many people participated; major factors which helped or were barriers to success.

#### **12. Evaluation**

It is important to do at least some simple evaluation, in order to assess whether the whole health at work programme has been effective, and to help make decisions about future activities. This should be based on the information collected as part of the monitoring exercise, but it is also a good idea to ask staff for comments and general views about the programme. These qualitative comments can be as useful as the quantitative information, particularly in planning more events. Publicising the things which have been successful and which staff have particularly enjoyed is a way of recruiting for activities in the future. (*see Evaluation Checklist below*)

### **Evaluation Checklist**

#### **1. Establish what the workforce's needs are before the programme starts and collect relevant baseline information.**

This could include: sickness absence figures, what the workforce thinks their main health problems are, the number of smokers, stress audit to identify perceived levels of stress and main problem areas.

#### **2. Set objectives, targets and timescale for each aspect of the programme.**

The aim is to be able to show what has been achieved, and whether some activities were more successful or useful than others, so the objectives should be measurable in some way.

#### **3. Monitor each aspect**

Collect information on numbers, record what has been done.

Things which can be measured quite easily: number of smokers, number of people participating in an activity, sickness absence figures

Things which can be recorded: a written policy, training sessions, changes to canteen menu, measured walking routes

#### **4. Find out what people think about the programme**

Carry out surveys, either written or in discussion, with:

the whole workforce, or a sample, to see which aspects they found most useful

the participants in any particular activity

representatives of the workforce, through negotiating committee, staff or works council, health and safety committee

managers and supervisors

#### **5. Assess the benefits**

Compare the information collected with the baseline data to see what has changed and to check which objectives and targets have been met. All results will need to be interpreted and discussed because:

Some benefits may take some time to show up, such as changes in sickness absence.

Some changes in health only happen slowly, and are affected by many factors outside the control of the workplace, such as reductions in levels of heart disease or mental ill health.

Some actions may not involve many people but may still be considered worthwhile, such as referring and treating individuals through an alcohol policy.

Some changes may be difficult to measure but may be reflected in general comments, such as improved staff morale.

## **6. Use the evaluation to plan the next stage of the programme.**

### **How We Can Help**

We can provide information and training sessions on a range of health topics – such as alcohol, healthy eating, smoking, stress and mental health promotion.

We can provide training in a variety of health related skills – such as assertiveness, communication, time management.

We can train volunteers from your workplace to run health sessions.

We can put you in touch with people who can run sessions in the workplace.

We can provide resources and display materials or help you to produce your own.

We can provide you with information about health issues.

We can liaise with other health professionals, such as dietitians.

We can help you to draw up and implement health policies and procedures.

We can provide appropriate training for managers, supervisors and employees.

We can help you to find appropriate organisations or agencies for individual referrals.