

The South & Mid Wales Chambers of Commerce hosted the above webinar on 24th April at 10:00am. Our speakers; Gethin Bennett from Capital Law and Layla Fear from Emotional Fitness have provided answers to some of the questions that were asked during the webinar.



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Q: What are our employers' legal obligations to office staff working from home in regard to health and safety assessments?

Answer from Gethin: Every employer owes a duty of care to the health and safety of their staff. What would amount to taking reasonable care will depend on the particular circumstances – for example, the steps an employer should take on-site in a manufacturing plant will be different to those taken to protect employees working from home.

For employees working from home, employers should check in with them regularly to ensure their working environment is safe and appropriate. For example, you should check if they have the appropriate equipment to be able to work from home. You may also want to have a Working from Home Policy in place.

Other steps which employers could take to ensure health and safety is maintained for homeworking include:

- adapting/ being flexible to the employee's way of working (particularly if the employee's circumstances mean they cannot work as they normally would – for example, due to childcare commitments or a disability)
- asking employees to fill in a health and safety questionnaire – see [here](#) for an example
- checking in regularly on employees' wellbeing.

[ACAS](#) and the [HSE](#) have good guidance on this to support employers.

Q: Can we maintain contact with furloughed employees?

Answer from Gethin: Absolutely, and regular contact should be encouraged. The key is ensuring that an employee on furlough carries out no work for the business – see the [Government's guidance](#) for more.

Q: Looking for some advice on how to maintain employee engagement and how to highlight wellbeing (aside from the obvious advice!)

Answer from Layla: Regular and meaningful communication is vital. Think about putting together a simple wellbeing strategy including highlighting any in house help (employee assistant programmes etc), sharing helpful web based resources (please see below for some key resources and follow me on LinkedIn for more) and encouraging face to face web meetings rather than emails for both work related meetings, 121s and social/team catch ups (virtual coffees/lunches/afterwork drinks). Many organisations are rolling out online Mental Health Aware and Resilience courses as an economical and meaningful resource.

[Key NHS endorsed helpful resources](#)

Q: How best can we keep ourselves motivated?

Answer from Layla: I wrote an [article about this specific point](#), it's around separating work and home life, keeping a healthy lifestyle and maintaining routine.

Q: How do you know the wellbeing solution provided by the organisations are the interventions needed by the staff?

Answer from Gethin:

Communication is the answer. It's a repeated point, but one worth repeating – check in regularly to see how employees are doing. You can only do what's reasonable in the circumstances, and you can only be sure that your initiatives are working when you see wellbeing results from employees or receive feedback from them on any initiatives.

So, before, during and after rolling out an initiative, ask employees for their own suggestions and their thoughts on any ideas you've put forward so far.

Q: How do you know what is required by staff and their perception of their Mental Health and Wellbeing?

Answer from Layla: The way most organisations tackle this problem is by asking their staff what they want at the outset. Generally, this is done by creating wellbeing focus groups and anonymous questionnaire. The key is asking your employees what they want. Mental Health and Wellbeing initiatives are surprisingly simple and economical. Generally, early intervention training has a 4:1 ROI for organisations. So, for every £1 an organisation spends on training they save £4 in the medium to long term on absenteeism, presenteeism and staff turnover. [Take a look at the report](#).

Q: Mental Health Champions - operating in a culture that doesn't have a Wellbeing Culture is simply ticking a box for the organisation. The MH First Aider will have to reply on someone coming up to them and talking about their situation. People who have a Mental Health issue, need a confidential independent method of raising their concerns, if not it's another tick box exercise with no evidence and no intelligence. It feels like a 'finger in the air' approach. I suggest anything we are doing or proposing should be evidence based and targeted, do you agree?

Answer from Layla: I think there are two points here. Firstly, I think that in order for a Wellbeing Culture to not simply be a tick box exercise, there needs to be a cohesive Wellbeing Strategy in place, and this needs support at Board Level. As part of a Wellbeing Strategy (which doesn't need to be costly or to have a separate budget) a number of initiatives can be introduced. The key is measurement in terms of the impact it is having and whether it is helping people.

Secondly, Mental Health First Aid, which is evidenced based and globally tested, upskills Mental Health First Aiders to notice when those around them are struggling. They are trained to look for signs and symptoms in others and approach them and offer help. Within an organisation, the Mental Health First Aider has a number of roles:

1. To actively engage with those who they think could be struggling in the organisation
2. To be a go-to if someone else is worried about a colleague and form a plan from there
3. To be someone for people to talk to if they are struggling and feel they want to talk

If you make a call or check in and someone comes back with a personal professional or mental health challenge, how do you ensure that person has the skills and to manage and deal with the issues raised?

Answer from Layla: The key with wellbeing conversations (checking in on someone) is to be able to be someone for them to talk to and someone who can encourage them to seek the right help. Offering emotional and practical support, a confidential space to just talk and encouraging them to seek professional and workplace help is the main role.

Answer from Gethin: From a legal perspective, you should treat this as you would with any employee facing a physical illness issue. So, check your sickness/ capability procedures and seek advice where you can on how to proceed. The steps to take will depend on the specific circumstances but may involve suggesting that the employee takes part in an Employee Assistance Programme, be referred to occupational health, or be given reasonable adjustments to their way of working.

Q: Can you throw more light on mental health first aid?

Answer from Layla: Mental Health First Aid was established over 20 years ago and is the world's most recognised Mental Health Awareness qualification. There are a number of training courses available Mental Health First Aid (two day), Mental Health Champions (one day) and Mental Health Aware (half day). Forms of these are now available virtually. The idea behind Mental Health First Aid is a practical skills and awareness course designed to give you: – A deeper understanding of mental health and the factors that can affect people's wellbeing, including your own – Practical skills to spot the triggers and signs of mental health issues – Confidence to step in, reassure and support a person in distress – Enhanced interpersonal skills such as non-judgemental listening – Knowledge to help someone recover their health by guiding them to appropriate support. [Take a look to find out more.](#)

'Significant Changes in people's behaviour' These observation skills require a huge amount of professional expertise. Is the best expert the person its hapening to? Are we better capturing people's perception at thier point of need to get a true insight of the challenges and barriers people are facing? Should that be independently and annonymously to give people assurance?

Answer from Layla: The key with wellbeing conversations (checking in on someone) is to be able to be someone for them to talk to and someone who can encourage them to seek the right help. Offering emotional and practical support, a confidential space to just talk and encouraging them to seek professional and workplace help is the main role.

Answer from Gethin:

I would add that, as employers, we're not expected to be medical/ psychological professionals – we can only do what's reasonable to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of our employees (by taking the suggested steps we discussed in the webinar).

Will a suicidal person have the cognitive ability or motivation to able to approach you or any Mental Health First Aider, in terms of where they are at, and how they are feeling?

Answer from Layla: This completely depends. The role of the Mental Health First Aider is to actively engage with those who they think could be struggling. They are training to spot behavioural and physical signs of suicidal behaviour and engage with that person to help them. The idea behind Mental Health First Aid is to upskill people to be able to spot these signs in others, as often, the person struggling won't seek help but will be displaying certain characteristics and behaviours to indicate they are struggling.