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WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY




Claire Rennie,
Alexander Technique teacher

This month, Claire Rennie, previously a senior engineering manager and now an Alexander Technique teacher working with repetitive strain injuries (RSI) sufferers, highlights one potential way of addressing the problem.

RSI is a tenacious and rapidly increasing problem for both employers and insurers, which is exacerbated by a lack of understanding surrounding diagnosis and treatment within the medical profession.

Implementing the Alexander Technique in the workplace could enable employees to learn to become aware of and change mental and physical habits that are contributing to their RSI, or the propensity to develop RSI. It is not only about ensuring that employees having the right equipment set-up but how they are conducting themselves moment by moment when using the equipment.

This investment in prevention or early intervention would pay back in days lost from work, insurance and legal claims as well as contributing to higher employee performance. Clinical trial results published in the *British Medical Journal* show that Alexander Technique lessons provide long-term benefits for back pain, another common work-related condition. Many RSI sufferers also have back, shoulder and neck pain, which is often a precursor to RSI. The trial results clearly show that 24 one-to-one lessons in the Alexander Technique led to important improvements in function, quality of life and reduction of days in pain.

With regards to corporate responsibility legislation, employers are liable if they do not provide adequate health and safety protection. Unless employers pro-actively address the issue they could be exposing themselves to untold risks in the future. 

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The monthly round-up of the news and trends in the wellbeing sector

...STOP PRESS

LONG HOURS 'ERODE MENTAL ABILITY'

Working long hours can have a detrimental effect on mental ability in middle age, according to a new study. Finnish researchers tracked 2,214 British civil servants in full-time employment. A set of tests (short-term memory, vocabulary, fluency, reasoning) were carried out in 1997-1999 (baseline) and again in 2002-2004 (follow-up). Participants working more than 55 hours per week had lower scores in the vocabulary test both at baseline and follow-up compared to those working 40 hours. Long working hours were also linked to a decline

DID YOU KNOW?
A fifth of employees work more than 45 hours a week. (Source: Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development)

in performance on the reasoning test. The longer the working week was, the worse the test results were. The research was published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology*.

CANCER COMP FOR SHIFT WORKERS

The Danish government has begun paying compensation to women who have developed breast cancer after working night shifts. The move follows a 2007 report by the International Agency for Research on Cancer which concluded that shiftwork is "probably carcinogenic to humans." The agency notes that studies have found that long-term nightworkers have a higher risk of breast cancer than women who do not work at night. Research has mainly involved nurses and flight attendants.

DENTAL BENEFITS LEAVE EMPLOYERS SMILING

The oral health of employees is the responsibility of companies, according to 71% of employers surveyed by Simplyhealth. The annual dental survey, which gathered the views of 255 HR managers / directors, reports that 40% of employers who offer dental benefits believe they help to increase workforce engagement. James Glover, corporate director at Simplyhealth, challenged the perception that dental benefits are expensive or complicated to administer. He said that 56% of HR managers believe dental benefits would help reduce sickness absence and 54% believe they would enhance recruitment and retention.

INSURERS TALK THE TALK... BUT DO THEY WALK THE WALK?

Health insurance and protection companies spend a lot of time discussing the importance of workplace health – so we thought we'd put their claims to the test each month! Do their workforces practise what they preach?

The South West tends to do pretty well in surveys of the nation's health. Children are more active and less likely to be obese, their parents shun smoking and binge drinking and their grandparents are more likely to escape hip fractures. All of which adds up to the highest life expectancy figures in England and glowing green boxes in government reports.

Bristol-based National Deposit Friendly Society did its bit to keep the Department of Health happy by

naming last month "Motivational March". The package on offer to employees could frankly have been taken straight from the pages of Dame Carol Black's report on the health of the UK workforce.

A room in the head office was transformed into a workout room furnished with gym equipment while one of the gardens (yes, they have more than one) housed a tennis court. Free fruit was supplied to all, in a bid to steal the healthy eating crown from the South East. If all goes to plan, March will have been not only a healthy month for National Deposit but a productive one too.

"Critically, workers performed significantly better on exercise days," according to work gym

researchers from, yes you've guessed it, the University of Bristol.



Health Insurance's VERDICT
It sometimes isn't easy persuading employees to get healthy but we reckon taking it one month at a time might do the trick!

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