NHS
Northumberland,
Tyne and Wear
NHS Foundation Trust

Stress at Work Policy - Practice Guidance Note **Stress at Work Guidelines – Overview of Policy – V04**		
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1   Introduction

1.1   Some pressure, even when high, can be positive and is frequently challenging and motivating. Responding effectively to this kind of pressure can lead to job satisfaction. When this pressure reaches a level we cannot cope with we may experience negative stress. Stress is defined as "an adverse reaction to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed upon them". This is when we feel we cannot cope with the demands and pressures placed upon us. This can also occur when there is too little pressure or challenge to motivate us.

1.2   These guidelines are concerned with the negative and harmful aspects of stress.

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1.3   HSE identified **six main causes** of stress or 'stressors' also known as the Management Standards:

- Demands
- Role clarity
- Control
- Relationships
- Support
- Change

2   Demands

2.1   Includes issues like workload, work patterns and the work environment.

2.2   The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns

2.3   What should be happening/states to be achieved:

- The organisation provides employees with adequate and achievable demands in relation to the agreed hours of work;
- People's skills and abilities are matched to the job demands;
- Jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of employees;
- Employees' concerns about their work environment are addressed

3   Control

3.1   How much say the person has in the way they do their work

3.2   The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns

3.3   What should be happening/states to be achieved:

- Where possible, employees have control over their pace of work
- Employees are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work
- Where possible, employees are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work

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- The organisation encourages employees to develop their skills

- Employees have a say over when breaks can be taken **and**

- Employees are consulted over their work patterns

4   Support

4.1   Includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues

4.2   The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors and

- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns

4.3   What should be happening/states to be achieved:

- The organisation has policies and procedures to adequately support employees

- Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their staff

- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues

- Employees know what support is available and how and when to access it

- Employees know how to access the required resources to do their job

- Employees receive regular and constructive feedback

5   Relationships

5.1   Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour

5.2   The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work

- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns

5.3   What should be happening/states to be achieved:

- The organisation promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness

- Employees share information relevant to their work

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- The organisation has agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour

- Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour

- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour

6 Role

6.1 Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles

6.2 The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities

- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns

6.3 What should be happening/states to be achieved:

- The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the different requirements it places upon employees are compatible

- The organisation provides information to enable employees to understand their role and responsibilities

- The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the requirements it places upon employees are clear; and

- Systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities.

7 Change

7.1 How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation

7.2 The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisation change

- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns

7.3   What should be happening/states to be achieved:

- The organisation provides employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes

- The organisation ensures adequate employee consultation on changes and provides opportunities for employees to influence proposals

- Employees are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs, if necessary, employees are given training to support any changes in their jobs

- Employees are aware of timetables for changes

- Employees have access to relevant support during changes

8   Guidance

8.1   Below is guidance to help staff and managers identify stress in the workplace and enable them to take steps to prevent issues arising.

8.2   **A - How to find out if there are any issues:**

- Informal chats with staff – encourage an open environment for discussion

- Distribute a questionnaire to identify specific issues (ref)

- Be aware of what is happening on a day to day basis

- Appraisal Process

- Return to Work discussions

- Reviewing sickness absence data

- Staff turnover and reasons for leaving

- Accident/Incident rates

8.3   **B - Symptoms and Warning signs of Stress in the Individual:**

- Persistent or recurring moods: Frustration, anger, depression, anxiety, tension, irritability, apathy

- Physical signs: aches and pains, raised heart rate, increased sweating, dizziness, blurred vision, skin problems, sleep disorders, exhaustion, nausea

- Behaviour changes: Lack of concentration, forgetfulness, absence from work/Increased sickness, poor timekeeping, avoidance of tasks, reduction in productivity, rigidity, inability to switch off from problems, loss of motivation

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- If you experience stress over long periods, other signs may develop. These may include, high blood pressure, heart disease, ulcers, chronic anxiety

8.4   **C – Recognising Signs of Stress in the Workplace**

- An increase in overall sickness absence

- Poor work performance – lower quality of work, poor decision making, poor timekeeping;

- Relationships at work – conflict between colleagues, poor relationships with people you work for

- Staff attitude and behaviour – loss of motivation and commitment, working long hours but with decreasing effectiveness

8.5   **D - Possible Sources of Stress in the Workplaces**

- Poor physical work conditions or job design

- Uncontrolled or excessive workloads and working hours

- Conflicting demands, uncertainty about responsibilities

- Inconsistent or poorly communicating management, lack of support

- Complaints from service users, colleagues or other sources

- Unresolved issues raised by the staff member

- Being set tasks that are inappropriate to ability, lack of appropriate training

- Inadequate staffing

- Harassment and bullying

- Exposure to violence and aggression

- Lone working

8.6   **E - Stress Prevention**

8.6.1   You can help yourself to manage and prevent the build-up of stress. Below are some ideas which could help you cope better:

- **At Work**

  o   Acknowledge if you are under stress

  o   Be more assertive

  o   Manage your time effectively

  o   Create and maintain a support network of colleagues and friends

- o Discuss the problem with colleagues, Trade Union (TU) reps or HR

- o Seek confidential support if appropriate – see contact numbers on page 12 of policy

- o Take advantage of training opportunities to extend your knowledge

- o Take a proper break from work at mealtimes

- o Delegate work when this is possible and appropriate

- o Praise and reward yourself and others

- **Take Care of Yourself**

- o Eat sensibly, get enough rest

- o Take regular exercise

- o Enjoy leisure activities and make time for yourself

- o Talk through your issues

- o Give yourself thinking time every day

9 Associated Documents

9.1 The following documents are available on the Trust intranet and may be useful to refer to in handling stress at work. This list is not exhaustive.

- NTW(HR)05 - Grievance Policy

- NTW(HR)06 – Raising Concerns Policy

- NTW(HR)07 - Disputes Policy

- NTW(HR)08 - Dignity and Respect at Work Policy

- Equality and Diversity Strategy

- Workforce Strategy

- NTW(HR)10 Sickness/Absence Policy

- Mental Health Issues in the Workplace PGN

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