

# Mental Health First Aiders - Principles of Operation

## Introduction

The main aims of Mental Health First Aid are to :-

1. Preserve life where a person may be at risk of harm to themselves or others
2. Provide help to prevent the mental health issue becoming more serious
3. Promote the recovery of good mental health
4. Provide comfort to a person with a mental health issue

The mental health first aider can play a vital role by supporting people in the early stages of them becoming unwell. The early intervention of a mental health first aider, as people are starting to become unwell can make all the difference.

The aim of the Mental Health First Aider is to support staff (rather than students, as there are existing support mechanisms for students).

Mental Health First Aiders are not counsellors, the aim is to support and then signpost individuals.

## What Does the Role Actually Involve ?

The role of a mental health first aider is to :-

- Provide signposting for colleagues to appropriate support services (eg Counselling, Employee Assistance Programme local mental health triage service (walk in centre)).
- In the event of a credible threat of harm to the individual themselves or others to take immediate advice from 111 (or in extreme cases contact call the University emergency number - 888 from an internal phone or 01509222141)
- Provide brief, informal support to colleagues in a way which maintains appropriate boundaries. The majority of this work will involve listening and offering support
- Support colleagues to appropriately identify mental health concerns
- Ensure that trends, or common areas of concern are highlighted to those who may be able to make an effective intervention e.g. highlight departments, courses or periods in the academic year, if there is an increase in reported mental health concerns

## Confidentiality

All discussions between individuals and you in your role as a Mental Health First Aider are confidential.

Confidentiality must never be broken, other than

- where you believe that there is a credible threat of harm to the individual themselves, or to another,
- or where the individual has consented to specific information being shared.

Breaching confidentiality, other than as described above, would result in your immediate removal from the role of mental health first aider.

Care also needs to be exercised when seeking to deal with the organisational root causes of stress and poor mental wellbeing. If seeking to take action to improve a workplace situation could result in an individual being identified, then the action should not be taken and confidentiality should be maintained.

## Recognition of role

- Staff work load may be weighted to account for this work.
- The role is voluntary and by mutual agreement. Notice to withdraw from the role will normally be one month.
- The business need of you established role will take precedence. Any conflicts of time should be discussed with your line manager in the first instance.

## Safeguards

To safe guard all concerned a number of 'flags' have been agreed.

- **Red flag** – If there is a credible threat to the individual concerned or others – then this is the only time confidentiality should be broken. In this case the University Security should be contacted via the University Emergency number - 888 from an internal phone or 01509222141 who will then contact the emergency services.
- **Black flag** – If you, or your line manager, believe that your physical or mental health is being adversely affected by acting as a Mental Health first aider, you will be asked to step down on a temporary or permanent basis.

## Support

### Personal Support

In the first instance should you need support please contact Veronica Moore of Counselling and Disability Services on 01509 222769.

An alternative is to contact the Employee Assistance Programme on 0800 111 6387 which is available 24hrs a day

### Support from the School

As a group of mental health first aiders you may be in a position to identify common themes or trends which, if addressed, could make a significant positive difference to your colleagues in the School for Science. In all cases confidentiality must be maintained.

To help you influence positive change, and so that you can give a flavour of how the role is developing a meeting will be arranged with the Dean of School or Director of Professional Service and the Operations Manager three times per year.

### Preparation for Meeting with Dean and the Operations Manager

As a team of mental health first aiders you will be operating largely independently of each other. So that you are able to have meaningful discussions regarding the challenges of the role, identify and promoting best practice and determining trends across the school the mental health first aiders will be encouraged to meet in advance of the meeting with the Dean of School or Director of Professional Service and Operations Manager.