

## The risk assessment process

<b>Step 1</b>	Know who might be harmed and how they may be harmed
<b>Step 2</b>	Know what measures are already in place to control the risks
<b>Step 3</b>	Identify what further action is needed to control the risk
<b>Step 4</b>	Identify who needs to carry out the identified action
<b>Step 5</b>	Set a time scale as to when the action is needed by

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### Step 1: Know who might be harmed and how they may be harmed

Most health and care organisations will have useful data that can help to identify the extent to which work-related stress is a problem. This could include rates of sickness absence, how much sickness was due to stress and anxiety, staff turnover, employee relations and grievance and disciplinary issues. For example:

- **Sickness absence information (self-certifications and fit notes):**
  - High levels of sickness absence could indicate a potential problem.
  - You may want to investigate reasons for the absence, however, be aware stress-related absence is not always reported as staff are often reluctant to admit to it.
  - Compare the timing of the absence – is it when, or immediately following periods of high demand on the nursing workforce.
- **Staff turnover:**
  - If there is a higher rate of staff turnover than you would expect in your organisation, or in parts of it, it may indicate a problem.
  - Do your 'exit interviews' suggest common reasons why nursing staff have decided to leave the organisation - is work-related stress a factor?
- **Feedback from disciplinary action:**
  - Research has shown managers can be a major source of stress in a team.
  - If a manager is treating people unfairly or is unable to control workloads coming to their area, it can lead to disputes within the team that could result in disciplinary action around bullying and harassment.
  - It can also affect patient care, leading to complaints and or possible claims against the organisation.
- **Accidents, incidents, and near misses:**
  - Stress can often affect concentration and a person's ability to sleep, potentially leading to a rise in accidents, incidents, and near miss occurrences.

- **Occupational health or employee assistance programme data**

- If your organisation has occupational health provision for nursing staff, statistical information relating to work-related stress, diagnosis of work-related stress, or associated conditions may be available.

- **Feedback from staff**

- Nurse managers and team leaders can often find out if problems exist by simply talking to their staff. For example:

Performance appraisals: Allows for one-to-one discussions about work, and the opportunity to explore if individuals are experiencing excessive pressure.

Team meetings: Provide an opportunity for team members to identify and share views on current issues which may be potential sources of undue pressure.

Informal talks with staff: Opportunity to find out the mood of individuals or the team.

Trade union contacts: Liaise with union representatives and have specific discussions whether work-related stress has been raised with them as a problem generally or for any individual/team.

'Walk-throughs': Walking through a ward or section, and observing what is happening, offers an opportunity to assess whether there are any obvious aspects of the job that are causing excessive pressure. This is most effective if done in combination with a talk-through

'Talk-throughs': Asking someone to describe what happens when a particular task is carried out. Talk throughs can be used to get nursing staff to think about whether tasks have the potential to lead to work-related stress

- **Surveys**

- Surveys can be a useful way of capturing the mood of nursing staff, however, would be disproportionate for smaller organisations where the same data can be gathered in other ways.
- The HSE has produced a [Work Related Stress Indicator tool](#) An example of a the questions found in the tool can be found at appendix one

It is helpful to use more than one data source and look for correlations between the messages they give. For example, if a single team has several disciplinary issues, it could indicate a problem with how the team is managed and/or how nursing duties are organised. If the same team also has a high staff turnover and sickness absence rate, this may demonstrate a work-related stress problem.

Whatever means you use to assess the risk of work-related stress, you should not just rely on one source of information. Try to put together an overall picture by considering data from several sources. It is not advisable to use surveys in isolation. When you have the results, check them with employees and other data sources to see if they agree this represents the true position.

## Step 2: Know what measures are already in place to control the risks

- ❖ Is there an organisational stress policy in place, and is this reviewed on a regular basis and/or if significant change occurs?
- ❖ Have suitable and sufficient organisational and departmental work-related stress risk assessments been carried out?
- ❖ Does the risk assessment take into account the 6 key workplace stressors which have been identified by the HSE?
- ❖ Are these risk assessments reviewed on a regular basis and/or if significant change occurs?

No	Standard	Descriptor	What it should look like
1	<b>DEMANDS</b>	This includes workload, work patterns and work environment	Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs
2	<b>CONTROL</b>	How much say staff have over the way they work	Employees indicate they have a say over how their work is carried out
3	<b>SUPPORT</b>	Includes encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the Organisation, line management and colleagues	Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors
4	<b>RELATIONSHIPS</b>	Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour	Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g., bullying at work
5	<b>ROLE</b>	Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles.	Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities
6	<b>CHANGE</b>	How is organisational change (large or small) managed and communicated in the organisation?	Employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change.

- ❖ Is there a process in place to carry out individual work-related stress risk assessments?
- ❖ Are protected characteristics and reasonable adjustments considered?
- ❖ Are individual risk assessments carried out in an environment where individuals are encouraged to talk?
- ❖ Are staff reminded they can speak to their RCN representative, health and safety representative, or human resources personnel?

- ❖ Are staff encouraged to seek advice from occupational health or their GP if they are concerned about their own health?
- ❖ Are staff signposted to the organisations employee assistance (counselling) services?

### **Step 3: Identify what further action is needed to control the risk**

For example:

- ❖ Set up an organisational steering group, led by a senior manager/directors and consisting of staff, trade union representatives and an occupational psychologist (or other relevant professional). The aim being to share ideas and develop solutions to implement and embed the HSE stress management standards approach across the organisation and develop a time bound action plan.
  - ❖ Agree with senior managers that work related stress will be a standing agenda item at board meetings.
  - ❖ Devise and implement a management procedure to ensure work related stress is discussed at team and individual meetings with staff.
  - ❖ Establish a wellbeing programme for staff.
  - ❖ Implement a system to monitor and review the action plan and identify if further measures are required.
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### **Step 4: Identify and agree responsibility for who needs to carry out the identified actions**

- ❖ Identified persons should have the competency and the resources to be able to implement the identified actions
  - ❖ Ensure there is senior management support for the identified individual
  - ❖ Best practice would be to nominate a deputy or team, to ensure the work is able to be taken forward should unforeseen absence occur
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### **Step 5: Identify a timescale for when action is needed by**

- ❖ Set a realistic time frame
  - ❖ Concentrate on the highest risk first
  - ❖ Ensure there is a system in place to review the progress of identified action and if a delay occurs, specify what those reasons are.
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## Appendix One: Work Related Stress Indicator Survey Questions

If you are planning to survey staff, the following questions are suggested. These are taken from the HSE work related stress indicator tool – further information can be found on the HSE website by following the HSE website [link](#)

Notes:

- The questions below are based on the six Management Standards and relate to the working conditions covered by each standard.
- Senior managers are employees and can be affected by stress, so include them in the survey. Survey all staff in all areas, don't make any assumptions about who may be under pressure
- For larger organisations, you may want to include additional 'demographic' questions. For example an NHS trust may want to see results from individual hospitals or the relative level of work-related stress in doctors or nursing staff, by asking questions about where people work and their job title, this can be achieved.

### Instructions:

“Your responses to the questions below will help us determine our working conditions now and enable us to monitor future improvements. For us to compare the current situation with past or future situations, it is important that your responses reflect your work in the last six months. All responses will be anonymous”

No	Question	Never (1)	Seldom (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
1	I am clear what is expected of me at work					
2	I can decide when to take a break					
3	Different groups at work demand things from me that are hard to combine					
4	I know how to go about getting my job done					
5	I am subject to personal harassment in the form of unkind words or behaviour					
6	I have unachievable deadlines					
7	If work gets difficult, my colleagues will help me					
8	I am given supportive feedback on the work I do					
9	I have to work very intensively					
10	I have a say in my own work speed					
11	I am clear what my duties and responsibilities are					
12	I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do					

13	I am clear about the goals and objectives for my department					
14	There is friction or anger between colleagues					
15	I have a choice in deciding how I do my work					
16	I am unable to take sufficient breaks					
17	I understand how my work fits into the overall aim of the organisation					
18	I am pressured to work long hours					
19	I have a choice in deciding what I do at work					
20	I have to work very fast					
21	I am subject to bullying at work					
22	I have unrealistic time pressures					
23	I can rely on my line manager to help me out with a work problem					
24	I get help and support I need from colleagues					
25	I have some say over the way I work					
26	I have sufficient opportunities to question managers about change at work					
27	I receive the respect at work I deserve from my colleagues					
28	Staff are always consulted about change at work					
29	I can talk to my line manager about something that has upset or annoyed me about work					
30	My working time can be flexible					
31	My colleagues are willing to listen to my work-related problems					
32	When changes are made at work, I am clear how they will work out in practice					
33	I am supported through emotionally demanding work					
34	Relationships at work are strained					
35	My line manager encourages me at work					