

G.12 Stress Management Policy and Procedure

1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

Stress is an individual's psychological/physiological reaction to a pressured situation. An individual's perceptions and personality will determine: how they interpret the pressured situation; the severity of their psychological/physiological reaction and their ability to cope with the resulting stress.

Workcover¹ (2006:15) says:

The health and community service sector (HCS) is a high-risk sector for job stress with negative consequences for both the individual and the organisation.

Signs of harmful stress can include:

- frequent absences from work;
- conflict;
- fatigue;
- unhappiness;
- complaints of sleep disturbances;
- avoidance of work; and
- difficulty in concentrating.

Workcover research (2006) found that the most effective response to workplace stress was at the organisation/work environment level by means of job redesign, workload reduction and improved communication.

2.0 SCOPE

This procedure is aimed at protecting all employees and volunteers from harmful stress. It is to be used in conjunction with the Mercy Services Post Traumatic Incident Policy.

3.0 POLICY STATEMENT

Mercy Services will identify and monitor sources of harmful levels of stress that affect its staff and volunteers. All reasonable efforts will be made to reduce harmful stress and to assist those who are affected. As much as possible stress will be assessed and treated at an organisational level as distinct from seeing the affected individual as the problem.

¹ Workcover NSW (2006) Job Stress: Causes, Impact And Interventions In The Health And Community Sector. Catalogue No. 5007
http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au/formspublications/publications/Documents/job_stress_causes_impact_interventions_health_community_sector_report_november_2006_5007.pdf

4.0 PROCEDURE

4.1 Identifying harmful stress

Harmful stressors identified by Mercy Services own experience and from industry research can be characterised as:

1. Service delivery stress:
 - workload too high or too low;
 - client severity or type;
 - lack of client/community understanding of work role;
 - unrealistic expectations from client/carer;
 - traumatic work experiences;
 - conflict with client/carer;
 - few opportunities to use appropriate skills;
 - an imbalance between effort expended and rewards received;
 - low level of decision making; and/or
 - external factors that make it difficult to work e.g. heavy/aggressive traffic between client's homes.

2. Organisation related stress:
 - job insecurity;
 - staff affected by racism;
 - bullying/harassment;
 - conflict with peers, Coordinator, Manager and/or other staff;
 - conflict between personal goals and organisational goals;
 - unclear about job role;
 - feeling unappreciated by others;
 - low support from supervisor (Coordinator or Manager);
 - lack of career development; and/or
 - low support from peers.

3. Personal stress:
 - work-home conflict; and/or
 - personal life.

All staff and volunteers are responsible for monitoring the impact these stressors are having on them as individuals. Staff and volunteers should discuss with their supervisor any concerns they have about current or anticipated harmful stress.

Supervisors (Chief Executive Officer/Managers/Coordinators/Director of Care Services/Registered Nurses at Singleton) have a responsibility to monitor the impact of stress on staff/volunteers they supervise. Particular attention should be paid to staff/volunteers who are: inexperienced, belong to a minority group, working alone, and/or known to be experiencing stress in other areas of their life.

Where supervisors identify harmful stress they will:

- conduct an assessment of all aspects of the work/organisation that could be contributing;
- determine the frequency and duration of stressors and the likely impact on staff/volunteers; and

- identify ways of controlling stress levels by modifying workplaces, work systems or management styles.

4.2 Preventing the build up of harmful levels of stress

The following are some of the ways supervisors can prevent the build up of harmful levels of stress:

1. Service delivery stress

- Supervisors ensure that staff are only given work within their knowledge, skills and competence;
- Supervisors are realistic about the level of support the client needs;
- Supervisors are realistic in assessing the time needed for Care Plan activities;
- Supervisors to offer staff opportunities to contribute their ideas to the design of their own work rosters, the allocation of work, the content of Care Plans, the way the work is done;
- Supervisors to review time needed if worker often runs overtime;
- Supervisors to refer client to additional or alternative services when appropriate;
- Supervisors to review Care Plan after an initial period (then annually) and make required adjustments;
- Supervisors to adequately describe worker role in Care Plan and in discussions with the client/carer;
- Supervisors to provide regular supervision with staff and listen to their issues;
- Supervisors consult with staff regarding workload before allocating extra shifts/duties; and
- see Post Traumatic Incident Policy.

2. Organisation related stress

- Management to run services in sustainable manner to prevent unnecessary disruption and restructure;
- Supervisor to develop career and training plan as part of annual Review & Development (performance appraisal) with each worker;
- Supervisors regularly review position descriptions;
- Supervisor to regularly consult with staff regarding service delivery and organisational issues, preferably within a meeting of their staff, rather than meeting with each person individually;
- Supervisors regularly review whether permanent employment, rather than casual employment, is suitable for a person/position;
- Management regularly review whether, in accordance with Mercy Services policy, decision making is being delegated to the most appropriate person (therefore empowering people to make decisions about their work);
- Management to address issues arising in staff satisfaction survey;
- Supervisors to ensure that staff act in accordance with the Mercy Services Code of Conduct;
- Management to act upon advice from Reconciliation Advisory Group;

- Supervisors trained in cultural competence; and
 - see Anti Aggression, Harassment & Bullying Policy.
3. Personal stress
- Management ensure staff know that Mercy Services will consider changes to staff hours/conditions where these are adversely affecting the staff person's family/personal life; and
 - Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) available for personal issues (see Appendix 1).

4.3 Controlling the impact of harmful levels of stress

The following are some of the ways supervisors (Coordinators and Managers) can control the impact of harmful levels of stress:

1. Service delivery stress
- As per 4.2.1 plus;
 - Supervisors to make reasonable adjustments to rosters, job role, equipment if requested;
 - Supervisor to promptly clarify staff or volunteer role/reasonable expectations with clients/carers/others if staff's efforts to do so fail;
 - Staff/volunteer to promptly address client/carer/others misunderstandings of staff role; and
 - Staff/volunteer to promptly address racism encountered from client/carer/others.
2. Organisation related stress
- As per 4.2.2 plus;
 - Supervisors to revise career/training plan with concerned staff/volunteer;
 - Supervisors to make reasonable adjustments to work to provide better work-home balance;
 - Supervisor to promptly address racism if staff or volunteer's efforts fail;
 - Supervisors to receive training for the role of supervising staff/volunteers;
 - Supervisor to address concerns expressed to him/her; and
 - Staff/volunteer to take unresolved issues to their supervisor's supervisor.
3. Personal stress
- Training and support to be offered to staff/volunteers who say they are stressed; and
 - EAP available for personal issues.

4.4 Awareness and Training

Where stress is identified as an issue the Mercy Services Management Team should be consulted regarding organising a session on identifying and responding to harmful stress.

All Supervisors are expected to have adequate skills in:

- designing appropriate Care Plans;
- time management;
- communication skills;
- assertiveness skills;
- personal stress management;
- running meetings;
- staff/volunteer supervision; and
- critical incident management.

Where training needs are identified these are to be included in the individuals training plan.

4.5 Conflict Resolution

See: Staff Grievance Process in Mercy Services Policy.

4.6 Compliance

The following are mechanisms for checking that this policy is being complied with:

- a) audit of new employee and new volunteer packages of information to ensure the inclusion of the EAP brochure;
- b) staff/volunteer satisfaction survey to include questions about support provided by Mercy Services; and
- c) audit of personnel files shows that stress related issues raised in the staff person’s Review & Development meeting were adequately addressed.

4.7 Evaluation

The performance indicator for the evaluation of this policy is:

- a) 100% of employee and new volunteer packages of information contain the EAP brochure;
- b) 75% of staff say they have a positive view on the support provided to them by Mercy Services; and
- c) 100% of audited personnel files show that stress related issues raised in the staff person’s Review & Development meeting were adequately addressed

5.0 REFERENCES

1. Current Issues	a) None identified
2. Australian Standards	a) AS/NZS 4360: <i>Risk Management</i>
3. Legislation	a) Work Health and Safety Act, 2011 (NSW) b) Work Health and Safety Regulations, 2011 (NSW) c) Anti Discrimination Act, 1977 (NSW)

4. Professional Guidelines	a) None identified
5. Codes of Practice	<p>a) Safe Work Australia (2011) Code Of Practice: How to Manage Work Health and Safety Risks http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/AboutSafeWorkAustralia/WhatWeDo/Publications/Documents/633/How_to_Manage_Work_Health_and_Safety_Risks.pdf</p> <p>b) Safe Work Australia (2011) Code Of Practice: Work Health and Safety Consultation, Cooperation and Coordination http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/AboutSafeWorkAustralia/WhatWeDo/Publications/Documents/624/Work_Health_and_Safety_Consultation_Cooperation_and_Coordination.pdf</p>
6. Codes of Ethics	<p>a) Australian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics 2010 http://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/1201</p> <p>b) Australian Psychological Association Code of Ethics http://www.psychology.org.au/Assets/Files/APS-Code-of-Ethics.pdf</p> <p>c) Code of Ethics for Nurses in Australia 2008 http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Statements/Codes-Guidelines.aspx#codesofethics</p> <p>d) Integrity in the Service of the Church https://www.catholic.org.au/media-centre/media-releases/cat_view/10-organisations/38-national-committee-for-professional-standards</p> <p>e) Mercy Services Code of Conduct</p>
7. Evidence	<p>a) WorkCover Authority of NSW, "Job Stress: Causes, Impact and Interventions in the Health and Community Sector". Nov. 2006.</p> <p>b) WorkCover Authority of NSW "Managing Loss and Grief in the Aged-Care Industry" August 2000</p> <p>c) Workcover "Preventing and Dealing With Workplace Bullying: A Guide for Employers and Employees" Catalogue No. WC04 (2008)</p>
8. Mercy Values	Justice, Care, Unity, Service, Respect

6.0 OTHER RELATED MERCY SERVICES POLICIES

- A.01 Mission and Philosophy
- A.03 Code of Conduct – Staff and Volunteers
- A.05 Reconciliation
- A.06 Pastoral Care
- C.01 Management Roles and Responsibilities
- C.04 Program Performance and Monitoring
- C.06 Risk Management
- D.10 Security
- D.11 Insurance
- E.08 Complaints
- E.11 Coordination with Other Services
- E.16 Protection of Vulnerable Adults from Abuse and Neglect
- E.17 Protection of Children from Abuse and Neglect
- E.19 No Response From Client
- E.20 Deteriorating Client Health
- F.01 Employment Conditions
- F.04 Learning and Development
- F.06 Management of Poor Conduct or Performance
- F.08 Staff Grievances
- F.12 Succession Planning
- G.05 Risk Management
- G.06 Safe Home Visiting
- G.07 Anti Aggression & Bullying
- G.11 Security at Mercy Services Centres

- G.13 Post Traumatic Incident
- G.23 Staff Wellness

7.0 RELATIONSHIP WITH STANDARDS

Aged Care Accreditation Standards	Home Care Standards	Disability Standards	EQUIP Standards
1.3, 1.4, 1.6, 2.3, 3.3, 3.4,	1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5	1.1, 1.2, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4,	1.5.1, 1.5.2, 1.5.4, 1.5.6, 2.1.2, 3.1.4, 3.1.5, 3.2.1, 3.2.2, 3.2.3, 3.2.4, 3.2.5

8.0 DOCUMENT CHANGES RECORD

Dates of change	Section altered	Natures of changes made
Aug 2005	First record of document	
07/10/09	a) Old 1.0 Purpose b) New 1.0 Introduction c) Old 3.0 References d) Old 4.0 Definition e) New 3.0 Policy Statement f) Old 5.1 g) Old 5.2.1 h) Old 5.2.2 i) Old 5.2.3 j) Old 5.2.4 k) Old 5.2.5 l) Old 5.2.6 m) Old 5.2.7 n) Old 5.2.8 o) Old 5.2.9 p) Old 5.2.10	a) Moved to 2.0 Purpose combined with scope b) added c) Moved to 5.0 References d) Included in new 1.0 Introduction e) Added f) Incorporated in new 4.1 - 4.3 g) Incorporated in new 4.2 h) Incorporated in new 4.1 - 4.3 i) Deleted j) Incorporated in new 4.1 - 4.3 k) New 4.4 l) New 4.5 m) Incorporated in new 1.0 and 4.1 n) Incorporated in new 4.2 - 4.3 o) Incorporated in new 4.2 - 4.3 p) Incorporated in new 4.2 - 4.3
28/03/2011	7.0 Relationship to Standards	Section added
03/08/2011	a) 1.0, 2.0, 3.0 b) 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 c) 4.3 d) 4.4 e) 4.6 & 4.7 f) 5.0 g) 6.0	a) Minor changes to wording b) Addition of some items, removal of duplications and some rewording c) Replace staff with staff/volunteer d) Regular education reduced to "as needed" as regular consultation expected to provide awareness raising e) Sections added f) New OHS laws referenced g) Non-OHS Policies listed
06/02/2012	a) All sections b) 5.0 References	a) Updated with how new WHS laws and Codes of Practice apply at Mercy Services b) Updated with new WHS laws and Codes of Practice
27/11/2012	All Sections	Organisation name updated
06/05/2015	a) All sections b) 4.4 Awareness and Training c) 5.0 References d) 7.0 Relationship to Standards e) Appendix One	a) Use the term Supervisors for the extended list of positions that supervise staff b) Management Team not L&D Coordinator to be informed if training needed c) Updated Codes of Ethics

<i>Dates of change</i>	<i>Section altered</i>	<i>Natures of changes made</i>
		d) Updated Disability, EQUIP Standards and added Aged Care Accreditation Standards e) Updated
Review due 06/05/2018		

Appendix One EAP Brochure (*\\Shared\Brochures\EAP*)

Key features of EAP ...

- Choice of experienced counsellors
- Confidentiality of the service respects your right to privacy
- Voluntary - it's your decision
- Available in working time or your own time
- First three appointments are free
- Available at a number of locations



Counselling

Voluntary

Free

Confidential

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Mercy Services

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