

Wellness Resources for a Whole Team

sponsored by **VETSOURCE™**

Jamie Holms, RVT

Mental health and wellness concerns are affecting your practice, whether you know it or not. Long gone are the days of pretending that mental health concerns and general wellness are best left outside of the office and that employees should leave their “problems” at the door. This will end up costing your practice money in the short term and the veterinary industry lives in the long run.

A report from the Mental Health in the Workplace Summit held in 2018 confirms:

- Mental illness is the leading cause of disability for U.S. adults aged 15 to 44.
- More days are lost to absenteeism due to mental health than to other illness or injury.
- One in five U.S. adults experience mental illness in a given year, and only 43% receive treatment (Deloitte).
- Mental illness costs the global economy \$1 trillion in lost productivity, with over 300 million people suffering from depression (World Health Organization or WHO).

In fact, as of 2019 The World Health Organization officially recognizes workplace ‘burnout’ as an occupational phenomenon. While burnout is not classified as a medical condition, it is classified as a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.

The WHO further classifies burnout by the following three factors and is specific to the occupational context and should not be used to describe experiences in other areas of life:

- Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion
- Increased mental distance from one’s job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one’s job
- Reduced professional efficacy

The costs of chronic disease, work-related injuries and illnesses, stress and employee disengagement in the U.S. surpasses \$2.2 trillion each year (or 12% of gross domestic product according to the Global Wellness Institute, The Future of Wellness at Work report from January 2016).

A survey from SHRM the Society for Human Resource Management from June 2016 shows the nationally employers are responding to the call as 80% of organizations are now providing wellness resources and information, and 70% of organizations now offer wellness programs.

Why? Research by the American Journal of Health Promotion, *What is the ROI for Workplace Health Promotion?* In January 2015 shows that every dollar invested in wellness programs returns the original dollar plus \$2.38. Not to mention that more than 40% of Millennials will select an employer based on their health and wellness benefits. (Bersin by Deloitte, HR Technology in 2017: A Disruptive Year Ahead, October 2016)

“The responsibility of the workplace is to ask an employee, ‘how can I help you be successful at work?’”
Mary Ann Baynton, program director for the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace. Creating a successful, impactful, long lasting mental health and wellness initiative requires more than offering a gym membership, offering health screenings, or yoga and meditation classes. An ideal initiative is a culture shift. It encourages teamwork and healthy habits practice-wide. We all know veterinary medicine is a team sport. Our approach to wellness and mental health can be approached from a similar vantage point. Addressing mental and physical health in the workplace may seem like an insurmountable journey, but it starts with very small but very intentional steps. We are in this together. This is your tribe, these are your people.

Do: Bring it to the team. The first step in a workplace-wide wellness initiative requires finding out which options employees are most interested in and how and if they would like to participate. Include questions asking about what would help support sustained participation and what environmental factors could enhance wellness for them?

Do: Engage wellness champions. There are people within your practice who are already active, practice good nutrition, mindfulness, and have healthy habits. Invite them to help and give them opportunities to lead.

Don't: Make participation mandatory. Not everyone will participate in wellness offerings, some will be enthusiastic and engage right away, others might need encouragement. Keep in mind that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to wellness.

Do: Make small, incremental changes. It's easy to get overwhelmed when making change. Your wellness initiative should be implemented incrementally to help build healthy habits over time and maintain engagement; the softball team, fitness classes, arts and crafts contests, and nutrition seminars don't need to all start the week you get back.

Do: Familiarize yourself with available resources. Utilize health insurance offerings. Your health insurance provider may have a wellness offering. Check to see if it meets your needs and budget. If this isn't available through your health insurance provider - check in with your workman's comp insurance provider. They are uniquely incentivized to help you with wellness resources.

Don't: Focus only on employees living with mental illness. Enhancing wellness practice-wide will maximize the energy, effectiveness and positivity of every employee. Wellness is for everyone.

Do: Get appropriate training. As someone's supervisor, it can be difficult and even inappropriate to speak with your employees about their mental health. Enter the professionals. EAPs are trained professionals who can teach supervisors about mental health and how to handle sensitive issues. According to the Employee Assistance Professionals Association, EAPs are designed to assist companies in "addressing productivity issues" and employees in "identifying and resolving personal concerns." You can also utilize community and online training opportunities like Mental Health First Aid and QPRinstitute.com to educate your team on mental health and suicide prevention.

Don't: Work through your lunch. Take your breaks, encourage the team to take breaks and get out of the building. Lead a wellness challenge. Be open about the wellness challenges you face.

Do: Break the stigma around talking about mental health concerns. Post #4EyesSaveLives lockbox stickers or magnets on your lockboxes, in break rooms and bathrooms. Talk to your team about why this is important to your practice.

Do: Set goals around your wellness program that both remind you that this is a solid business strategy and that support the unique needs of your employees.

Do: Make this a culture shift. "How does this impact the health, wellness, and safety of our team?" You can make a fundamental change in the mental health and wellness of your practice by taking the time to ask this at every team meeting, every change management discussion and at every policy review.

Wellness Resources for a Whole Team Worksheet

Jamie Holms, RVT

OBJECTIVES

Addressing mental and physical health in the workplace may seem like an insurmountable journey, but it starts with very small but very intentional steps. We are in this together. This is your tribe, these are your people. Use the tool kit below to help you develop your plan wellness in your practice. What resources do you already have? Who in your practice is already a wellness champion? Why does this matter to the culture of your practice?

TOOL KIT

RESOURCES

- Health Insurance Company
- EAP
- Workman's Comp
- Community Resources

WELLNESS CHAMPIONS

-

GOALS FOR WELLNESS

- *Reduce turnover*
- *Improve engagement*

KEY POINTS

- **Do:** Take it to the team
- **Do:** Set goals
- **Do:** Make this a culture shift
- **Do:** Set the example
- **Don't:** Make participation mandatory

What does a wellness shift in your practice culture look like in 5 years?

What does a wellness shift in your practice culture look like in 1 year?

What 3 small steps will you take in the next 8 weeks to begin this process?
