BMA mental wellbeing charter

The workforce is the NHS's most valuable asset and a focus on staff mental health and wellbeing will ensure that the service is able to deliver the best care for patients.

This charter sets out practical actions employers can take to build a supportive culture, develop a wellbeing strategy, create healthy workplaces, tackle the stigma around mental ill-health, foster peer support, and ensure support services are accessible and high-quality. There are also wider systemic pressures (see the BMA **Caring, Supportive, Collaborative: a future vision for the NHS** report) that have an impact on staff wellbeing and the BMA will continue to work to deliver these broader changes.

The BMA is asking employers to sign up to the standards in our charter. Get in touch with your local BMA Representatives if you want to help us promote a supportive culture and a healthy working environment for doctors.

Measures to build a culture that supports mental health and wellbeing

— **Value staff and students:** provide leadership on wellbeing and lead by example; enable a safe and healthy environment based on shared values and trust where people can flourish.
— **Prevent and tackle the cause of ill-health:** risks and pressures on staff are identified and managed; raise awareness around specific risk factors for medical professionals and how to maintain good physical and mental health; encourage staff to take breaks in the middle of shifts as well as to eat and drink regularly; acute clinical care should not be scheduled over lunch time; ensure staff have a named line manager and have regular 'wellbeing check-ins'.
— **Encourage conversations about mental health and the support available:** facilitate a safe environment where doctors and medical students feel able to talk about their mental health and are listened to; tackle the mental health stigma by normalising and encouraging help-seeking behaviour.
— **Develop and implement effective policies:** follow national guidance on managing workplace health and wellbeing of employees[1] , regularly review policies and practices (e.g. around sickness absence, bullying and harassment, and violence) with line managers to ensure they are practical and effective; encourage a healthy work-life balance and flexible working options.

Develop and implement a wellbeing strategy

— Appoint a named board member responsible for staff wellbeing (for example, a 'Wellbeing Guardian')
— Create a wellbeing strategy that is linked to wider organisational objectives, that is effectively resourced with management support and a clear engagement and implementation plan.
— Involve staff in decisions and reach out to those who may be difficult to engage; ensure the plan recognises the needs of a diverse workforce.
— Monitor the wellbeing of medical staff and ensure regular reporting to the board.
— Monitor the delivery and performance of wellbeing measures and interventions against objectives, taking on board feedback to enhance and shape the support offered.

Embed health and wellbeing into line management

— Ensure supervisors, line managers, and senior staff are given the tools to be able to offer core guidance on health and wellbeing at work and can refer/signpost to further support and advice.
— Provide training to develop line management skills, including how to have health and wellbeing conversations.

Make support services accessible

— Provide easy access to appropriate, high-quality in-house and/or external health interventions and encourage self-referral options, including:
  — comprehensive, confidential and timely occupational health services;
  — psychological counselling and addiction support (ideally 24/7).
— Ensure services accommodate working patterns; evaluate services to ensure these meet the needs of users.
— Promote services regularly, providing clear guidance on how support can be accessed and stress confidentiality.

[1]For example, NICE mental health and wellbeing guidance.

Create safe and healthy work places

— Involve staff in the (re-)design of workplaces, ensuring these are assessed regularly to reduce the risk of harm to staff; provide access to indoor or (ideally green) outdoor spaces where staff can exercise or take a break.
— Encourage active lifestyles and commutes; offer lockers, shower/changing facilities, cycle parking spaces.
— Provide spaces to rest and socialise, ensuring access to break rooms where staff and students can socialise, relax, sleep and prepare food. For further information see the BMA Facilities and Fatigue Charters in England and Wales.
— Provide access to nutritious food options, ensuring food outlets are compliant with the relevant quality standards[2] and the latest advice on nutrition provided by national public health agencies.
— Ensure access to free drinking water.
— Provide dedicated car parking spaces (especially for those working night shifts).

Actively foster peer support

— Offer mentoring, pastoral support, and/or coaching arrangements.
— Use a buddying system between resident doctors, to help reduce isolation.
— Provide timely post-incident support; offer access to talking groups for doctors to support each other (such as through Balint groups or Schwartz rounds).
— Offer opportunities to train doctors on how to undertake an effective debrief.
— Introduce mental health first aiders, buddies, and/or champions.

Support staff on sickness absence leave or who are returning

— Develop and implement an effective return to work policy.
— Maintain meaningful communication with those on absence leave (agree frequency of contact) and keep them in the loop about important developments.
— Ensure a smooth return to work, including setting up a meeting on their return to work, or as soon as reasonably practicable thereafter to agree an individualised plan for return.
— Ensure this is followed up with a review meeting to discuss progress.
— Create workplace adjustments, ensuring advice from occupational health teams is implemented consistently.

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[2]For example, Health and Wellbeing CQUIN standards in England.