



# Recognising and responding to mental health problems in the workplace: why *beyondblue*?

## Introduction

Sainsbury Centre aims to identify and make widely available effective interventions which build the skills of line managers and supervisors to identify mental distress in their staff and colleagues and to be able to appropriately support and manage people at work.

## Mental health at work

The cost of mental health problems to business is just over £1,000 per employee per year, or almost £26 billion across the UK economy (Sainsbury Centre, 2007).

Effective programmes which manage mental health at work can save around 30% of these costs. Yet employer awareness of mental health issues at work in the UK is extremely poor. Most senior managers vastly underestimate the scale of the problem and most think it will never affect their workplaces (Shaw Trust, 2006).

A recent survey of managers (Employers' Forum on Disability, forthcoming) also found that managers feel they need more appropriate training and support at work to effectively manage staff experiencing mental health problems. Every day, opportunities to support people experiencing mental distress to access appropriate treatment and maintain their employment, are being missed in workplaces across the UK.

## The benefits of *beyondblue*

Following a review of available training programmes in the UK and overseas, we identified the Australian *beyondblue* National Workplace Programme (see <http://www.beyondblue.org.au>) as a possible evidence-based training programme for line managers in the UK.

We believe the Workplace Programme of *beyondblue*: the national depression initiative can be effective to build the skills of line managers. Sainsbury Centre commissioned the University of Nottingham to carry out an independent analysis of one of *beyondblue's* management training programmes. We have also reviewed *beyondblue's* learning materials and spent time with them to understand their delivery process. This has led us to conclude that:

1. The *beyondblue* workplace training programme is effective in Australia:
  - Line managers' knowledge about depression increased.
  - The proportion of line managers who said they would be prepared to support a colleague with depression rose significantly.
  - Understanding of how to manage depression at work and knowledge of where to go for support rose markedly.
  - These changes were not affected by the type of employment, by the

organisation the manager was from or by the trainer.

2. It has the potential to be delivered on a large scale, across the UK, by trainers with suitable skills because:

- *beyondblue* has an established programme and set of quality assurance systems to enable large scale delivery
- It is already operating across a range of employment sectors
- The criteria for selecting trainers are applicable to the UK and initial applications of interest suggest that a suitable number of qualified trainers can be made available here.

3. The philosophy and approach of the training programme reinforces the messages from the established evidence base about what works, that is:

- The workplace has an important role both in the promotion of good mental health, the prevention of mental ill-health and in supporting effective interventions which enable staff to remain in work.
- Encourage people to access treatment at an early stage while continuing to support people appropriately in the workplace i.e. through good management and adjustments as needed
- Building people's conversational skills and their confidence to maintain positive relationships in the workplace.

(BOHRF, 2005; Black, 2008; Waddell and Burton, 2006; Waddell et al, 2008)

### **About the UK pilot**

We are now testing the impact of the *beyondblue* National Workplace Programme in the UK to see if it addresses the current gap

in training identified by both managers and employers.

We are piloting the *beyondblue* Workplace Programme with employer partners including the Department of Health, Kent County Council, Royal Mail Group, the submarines business of Rolls-Royce, the Royal College of Nursing and Tate & Lyle. The training will be delivered through a small team of UK based trainers who have been trained in the programme by Sainsbury Centre and *beyondblue*.

We will evaluate the success of the training with line managers in the pilot programme as well as the feasibility for delivery in the UK and publish the results during 2009.

### **References**

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