Roundtable on Workplace Mental Health

The Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace (the Centre) hosted a Roundtable on Workplace Mental Health in February 2016, in Vancouver. A small group of Human Resources Management Association members joined in person, with many more by webinar.

Here’s what we learned from each other about workplace mental health:

Participants have many initiatives in place now:

- Wellness committees
- Engagement committees
- Culture committees
- Occupational health and safety committees
- Employee and Family Assistance Plans (EFAPs)
- Policies on bullying and harassment, respectful workplaces, conflict resolution
- Diversity teams and programs
- Mindful Employer Canada In-House Program
- Weekly 1:1 meetings
- ‘Stay’ interviews – similar to an exit interview where questions are asked about wellness in the workplace, what has been going well and what could be done differently
- New employee onboarding program – an interactive, engaging set of activities for new employees that requires them to meet and interview staff in various departments

Suggestions to improve workplace mental health:

- Psychological health and safety of employees explicitly included in the organization’s mission statement.
- A workplace culture where:
  - Everyone within the work environment is treated with respect and dignity
  - There is an understanding that mental health issues exist and can be managed
  - Peer support, mentorship programs, and coaching are available for all staff, particularly managers and leaders
  - All staff feel safe coming forward with issues
  - Going for a mental health break can be talked about like going to the gym
  - Employers can consider healthy break activities like fitness breaks, walks, workplace gyms and meditation rooms.
- Comprehensive health and wellness initiatives provide a multidisciplinary approach to benefits that may include counselling, nutrition, physical activity and holistic and complementary approaches.
Roundtable participants identified challenges and potential solutions (often low cost or free), shared in the table below.

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<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Potential Solutions from the Centre</th>
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<td>Limited funding</td>
<td>All resources and tools on the Centre’s Workplace Strategies for Mental Health website are available in English and French to anyone, anywhere, at no cost. These resources can provide a credible and practical starting point for any organization.</td>
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<td>Lack of personal knowledge among HR professionals to make the business case around investment in workplace mental health and psychological health and safety in the workplace</td>
<td>The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) offers a 2-day Psychological Health and Safety Advisor Certification Program that provides a detailed understanding of how to make the business case and assist with planning for psychological health and safety in your workplace. For more information see: <a href="http://www.cmha.ca/mental-health/the-workforce-mental-health-collaborative/training/">http://www.cmha.ca/mental-health/the-workforce-mental-health-collaborative/training/</a>. For those wanting more in-depth knowledge of the subject, the University of Fredericton offers an online course in Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace.</td>
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<td>Stigma, including self-stigma</td>
<td><em>Working Through It</em> is a series of video interviews with employees who experienced mental illness at work. This resource can help reduce stigma. Free weekly <em>Working Through It</em> emails with links to the short video clips can help deliver an awareness program to staff.</td>
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<td>Comfort level of managers to have a discussion with someone who may be struggling with mental health issues</td>
<td>A proven approach is to engage employees in developing solutions by asking key questions: 1. How can I help you be successful at work? 2. What will you do to ensure this workplace plan is successful for you? 3. How will we deal with future issues in a way that is healthy for you? More information is available at no cost on the web page, <a href="http://www.cmha.ca/mental-health/the-workforce-mental-health-collaborative/training/">Developing a Workplace Plan</a>. <em>Managing Mental Health Matters</em> includes scenario-based video training modules that walk through a manager’s interactions to help manage the discussion with the employee. Modules include Managing Performance and Managing Conflict.</td>
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<td>Small business owners who do not have HR staff, or someone else to help manage workplace mental health issues</td>
<td>The content on the <em>Workplace Strategies for Mental Health</em> website was developed with the small business owner in mind. Refer to <em>Job-Specific Strategies for Small Business Owners</em> web page for more information.</td>
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| Employees need an understanding of how to build and protect their own mental health | Information for employees to educate themselves on mental health can be found under *Understanding Mental Health Issues*.  
- Links to trusted mental health organizations that provide information on depression, anxiety and other conditions  
- Links to credible mental health and addiction self-assessment tools  
- Links to trusted organizations that offer approaches to wellness. 
Break activities that were developed by health and wellness professionals are available at no cost from *Healthy Break Activities*. |
| Working through an accommodation with an employee who may have a mental health concern:  
- Accommodation can be trial and error  
- Doctors may not be aware of the information required to address work issues  
- Need better strategies to address workplace concerns | *Supporting Employee Success* is a tool for the employer, employee, and healthcare professional to plan an accommodation when mental health might be a factor. The parties contribute to the plan with the ultimate goal of supporting the employee to do his or her job while maintaining their well-being. 
*Managing Accommodation* and *Managing Return to Work* are free scenario-based video training modules that walk through a manager’s interactions to plan for accommodation and return to work. |
| Leaders/managers who are afraid to show vulnerability may set the tone for others to cover up their own mistakes | One activity shared at the roundtable was ‘Mistake Meetings’, where each member of a team (starting with the leader) discusses a mistake that they made recently and how they dealt with it or what help they need in addressing it. Over time, this process allows employees to feel safer and more comfortable talking about their own mistakes so that they can be learning opportunities rather than something to be covered up. If there is a culture of fear and denial the leader may have to do this him or herself a few times before asking employees to do the same. 
(From *Resolving Workplace Issues*, by Mary Ann Baynton) |
## Challenges

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<td>Differing perspectives among employers, frontline management, and employees on the issues that impact psychological health and safety</td>
<td>Guarding Minds@Work (GM@W) provides organizations with free online assessment tools, reports and action planning tools to address psychological health and safety of their workplaces. This provides an evidence base on which to build an effective plan to address psychological health and safety. How to Use Guarding Minds@Work More Effectively is a guide to help you get buy-in and commitment from all workplace stakeholders, to prepare for and successfully execute the survey and follow up response.</td>
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<td>Develop a shared vision for psychological health and safety in the workplace</td>
<td>The Centre’s Psychological Health and Safety Management System supports the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace that defines best practices. On The Agenda provides materials for each Psychological Factor as identified in the Standard and by GM@W, to help leaders facilitate conversations with teams about improving workplace psychological health.</td>
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<td>Managers and employees need to improve their emotional intelligence skills</td>
<td>Emotional Intelligence includes:</td>
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<td>• A scenario-based video training module</td>
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<td>• A Skills Assessment for any employee, including leaders</td>
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<td>• Personal Development and Team Building Activities</td>
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<td>Frustration, intensity, and a general lack of respect are interpreted as bullying, but do not qualify as a complaint. Need to go beyond investigations to changing interactions.</td>
<td>Harassment and Bullying Prevention focuses on preventing and responding to behaviours that are potentially harmful to others. A new approach to self-awareness and effective intervention is included.</td>
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The following table includes the opportunities identified by roundtable participants. The Centre will take these ideas and act as a catalyst to help make some or all of them a reality.

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<td>Need to convince leadership to take action:  • Build the business case to show how implementing psychological health and safety in the workplace can benefit the organization.  • Develop a simplified business case form that ties a company’s strategic objectives to psychological health and safety. Examples of what can go into a strategic plan include: employee engagement, customer service, return on investment, workplace productivity, wellness, business process improvement, diversity and inclusion, training, succession planning.  • Create a simple video that would show examples of what the conversation might look like and discuss the examples with leaders.</td>
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<td>Need metrics to advance the cause:  • Employers want to review their own statistics on productivity, disability and turnover.  • Develop a chart to include suggested metrics: turnover, grievances, duration of disability, medication costs, EFAP access and productivity.</td>
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<td>• There are a lot of resources out there, but employers need help finding the information needed for a specific situation.  • Internally, employers don’t know what to do with the mental health resources.  • No one knows where to go for relevant tools.  • Create checklists for training and the employment life cycle.  • Create a roadmap that prompts with questions to determine which resources a user may need, laid out like a buffet where you make your selection based on your need.  • Develop resources using different methods such as videos, webinars and face-to-face events.  • Micro learning approach to training.</td>
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<td>• Time is an issue. Need ways to deliver resources and training that are quick and easy to use.  • Develop a 30-day Psychological Health and Safety Challenge, sending small bits of information every day, framed in a positive way for leaders (you could use Take Your Break activities).  • Track moods and stress levels with wearable fitness devices. Offer incentives.</td>
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<td>• Need ways to make resources fun and user-friendly.</td>
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Next Steps

2017 marks the Centre’s 10th anniversary. Our anniversary theme will be *Advancing Workplace Mental Health, 2007-2017*. We will celebrate Canadians working together to raise awareness, reduce stigma and evolve approaches to supporting psychological health and safety of employees in the workplace.

Throughout 2017, we will tell the story of the evolution of workplace mental health in Canada over the last 10 years, and recognize those the Centre has worked with to help position Canada as an international leader in workplace mental health. In doing so, we will be sharing a vision for the future based on the contribution of ideas at roundtables such as this one.

**Thank you to HRMA and its members for your support and expertise!**