

Positive workplaces for Social Workers

Quick summary sheet

NICE supports person-centred care and support through the development of evidence-based guidelines and quality standards.

Guidelines:

- Comprehensive set of recommendations for action
- Focused on a particular topic/setting
- Aimed at a range of audiences
- Show the underpinning evidence

Quality standards:

- Set of statements to help improve quality
- Focused on areas of poor quality or variation in practice
- Can be used to measure improvement or demonstrate good quality

Examples of guidance topics relevant to Social Workers:

Mental wellbeing at work ([PH22](#))

Healthy workplaces: improving employee mental and physical health and wellbeing ([QS147](#))

Workplace health: management practices ([NG13](#))

Workplace health: long-term sickness absence and incapacity to work ([PH19](#))

The scenarios below show how NICE guidance could be used in social work practice. We recognise that NICE guidance would be used alongside other sources of information to support professional judgement.

Scenario 1—Retention of Social Workers

Situation:

A local council is struggling to retain social workers.

Analysis of exit interviews shows high levels of sickness absence and negative impact on mental health and wellbeing due to the emotional pressures of the role.

Examples of NICE guidance:

Mental wellbeing at work (PH22— recommendations 2 & 3)

Includes advice for organisations to ensure systems are in place to assess and monitor the mental wellbeing of employees. Also for organisations to consider flexible working opportunities for staff.

Action:

The PSW and workforce lead use NICE guidance and the Social Work Health Check to create a business case.

This asks the council to introduce new systems and opportunities for social workers, designed to proactively promote mental wellbeing and thereby reduce sickness absence and improve retention rates.

Scenario 2—Investing in line managers

Situation:

A council HR department have raised a number of concerns about the way that absence and performance issues are being managed within social work teams.

Completion of practice supervisor self assessments by team managers has highlighted inconsistencies in the training and support they have received.

Examples of NICE guidance:

Workplace health: management practices
(NG13—recommendations 1.6 & 1.9)

Includes advice on positive senior leadership behaviours, including proactive support for line managers.

Also includes a list of skills and knowledge that line managers should receive training in.

Action:

On behalf of the director the PSW works with HR and the workforce lead to benchmark existing line manager induction training against NICE guidance.

As a result the training is updated to include additional content to empower line managers to offer proactive support and manage sensitive situations with greater confidence.

Scenario 3—Positive organisational change practices

Situation:

A local council is proposing to relocate locality teams to a number of health centres, as part of a new integrated support service.

The team managers are aware that the proposed changes are impacting negatively on the wellbeing of many of the team. They are concerned this might undermine their professional identity.

Examples of NICE guidance:

Healthy workplaces: improving employee mental & physical health & wellbeing
(QS147—statements 3 & 4)

This highlights the value of managers taking a proactive approach to identifying and managing stress.

It also makes specific reference to the value of staff engagement forums, so that staff can be involved in organisational decisions.

Action:

The team managers use the NICE standard to make a case to the director for the introduction of a staff engagement forum to discuss and help shape the proposed integrated support service.

The staff engagement forum is introduced and provides staff with a positive forum in which to consider solutions to address their concerns.

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