



Health and Work Champions

Enabling Staff to Talk about Work

#HealthWorkChamps #LetsTalkAboutWork

SYNOPSIS:

The Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT) working in partnership with Public Health England (PHE) have trained over 100 occupational therapists and other health care professionals to be Health and Work Champions.

The Health and Work Champions project aims to create a culture change in health and social care, so it is routine practice for all staff to be able to talk about employment with the people they work with. They deliver training sessions to encourage their colleagues to routinely ask and support people with their employment aspirations.

The NHS alone, for example, has a million contacts with people every 36 hours and many of these are lost opportunities to talk about the health benefits of good work. Health and Work Champions are training colleagues across multiple settings, including acute and community settings for people with mental health, physical health and learning disabilities.

1. Employment is one of the most important determinants of life expectancy and quality of life. Employment, or the lack of it, has a wide impact; children growing up in workless households are almost twice as likely to fail at all stages of education compared with children growing up in working families (PHE 2017).
2. For most people, employment is the norm. Nearly 75% of the working age population in the UK are in employment. However, this figure drops for disabled people: only 46% of people with disabilities related to musculoskeletal conditions and 32% related to mental health conditions are in employment.
3. Health and care professionals and other staff can be pivotal in giving the people they work with the skills, belief and confidence needed to remain in or return to work. The project aims to empower staff to have informed and supportive conversations about starting and maintain meaningful work as a key part of staying and keeping well.
4. Health and Work Champions deliver a package of training to colleagues which aims to give the skills and confidence needed to discuss the benefits of work. The training aims to help staff to:
 - Understand the relationship between health and work, and what good quality work looks like e.g. safe working environment, job security, involvement in decision making, positive social connection (Marmot, 2010)
 - Think about ways to discuss work in a wide range of settings with a wide range of people
 - Know how to refer and signpost people for further support from both local and national services.



5. The training uses the “The Five R’s” (Macmillan, 2012), which asks staff to:
 - **Raise** work issues with people early in the intervention in a sensitive and acceptable manner
 - **Recognise** the risk factors of being out of work
 - **Respond** effectively to the straightforward work problems people identify
 - **Refer** people who have more complex difficulties to the most appropriate specialist service
 - **Revisit** work issues at intervals during the intervention
6. The first phase of project evaluation by the University of Salford used pre and post training questionnaires to gauge changes in knowledge and attitude. Between January and June 2017, 487 staff were trained, 40% were allied health professionals, 25% were doctors and 15% were nurses. There was a statistically significant improvement in attendees’ knowledge and confidence. Focus groups of the Health and Work Champions showed the project had a high positive impact on their personal and professional development.
7. The second phase of the evaluation by ICF used a post training survey, interviews and site visits to organisations with Health and Work Champions. Between November 2017 and February 2018, 570 staff were trained, 50% were allied health professionals, 18% were doctors and 13% were nurses. Nearly all those who completed the survey felt it was relevant and helped them understand how to talk about employment. Senior staff in the organisations recognised the impact the project could have on their employees’ own health and wellbeing as well as widening staffs’ understanding of the multi-faceted components of recovery.
8. The third phase of evaluation showed that between March and December 2018, 447 staff were trained and over 90% agreed that they now know more about their role in supporting patients to return to work. In total over 2000 health and care professionals have been trained.
8. The Health and Work Champions project is expanding with more people volunteering in this role from a wide range of settings. For more information about the project and upcoming events, visit: <https://www.rcot.co.uk/promoting-occupational-therapy/health-and-work-champions-promoting-health>

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