Recommendations for Supervisors: Preventing Physical and Psychological Injury in the Workplace

Employees engaged in computer based tasks are at risk of developing body stressing injuries that can have significant personal and organizational costs. Consideration of injury prevention strategies in your workplace will help to decrease the risk of work related injury, and contribute to the overall health and wellbeing of staff. The recommendations are as follows;

- Job descriptions should include a variety of tasks that allow changes in body postures and movement throughout the day. No more than four to five hours per day is to be spent continually typing or entering data.
- Ensure that suitable furniture and equipment are provided for staff. This includes checking that equipment is maintained in good working order. Note that office chairs commonly have a warranty of five years and generally need to be replaced every five to ten years.
- Ensure your work group has Occupational Strains Liaison Officers (OSLO's) who are able to conduct basic ergonomic assessments of workstations for your staff.
- New staff should have an OSLO assessment upon commencement and staff should be re-assessed after any relocations.
- Advise staff who are engaged in primarily screen based tasks to install break software on their computer and to comply with a break schedule.
- Any working from home arrangements should be discussed and clearly articulated. If a staff member is working from home the home work area needs to be suitably set up in accordance with the guidelines for Setting up your workstation.
- Advise staff to lodge an online incident notification form on HORUS online as soon as any musculo-skeletal symptoms appear. Contact will be made with the staff member by Work environment, Health and Wellbeing within 24 hours.
There is also a significant contribution of non-physical causes such as chronic or prolonged workplace stress to the development of occupational injuries. Consideration and acknowledgement of the potential psychological stressors in the workplace for staff should be a high priority as a supervisor to maintain a happy and healthy workforce.

Common causes of work related stress can be attributed to;

- Communication breakdowns between workers and managers. Often individuals may feel unable to voice their concerns or feel they were not listened to when they have raised issues in the past.
- Job insecurity and the threat of redundancy.
- Excessive performance monitoring.
- Too much change in the organisation of the workplace and in an individual’s role.
- Fatigue due to excessive work demands.
- A lack of opportunity for an individual to utilize their talents within the workplace.
- Exposure to prejudice regarding age, gender, race, ethnicity or religion.

Some of the physical and psychological symptoms of stress can include

- Headaches
- Backaches and other muscular aches
- Poor memory and confusion
- Feeling teary, irritable or angry
- Loss of energy and motivation
- Changes in appetite and weight
- Sleep difficulties
- Generally feeling run down
The following recommendations are made to help reduce work place stress in your department:

- Provide effective leadership especially during periods of change.
- Focus on recruiting and developing supportive leaders with strong people management skills.
- Provide/allow time for training to ensure staff are suitably skilled for their work tasks.
- Regularly review the work load demands and encourage staff communication about any concerns.
- Ensure workloads in peak periods are managed.
- Ensure staff have a clear awareness of their roles.
- Manage any performance issues in a timely and appropriate way.
- Allow an adjustment period where there may be reduced work rates during learning periods or after return from leave.
- Model and implement respectful interactions between staff members.
- Encourage social opportunities to establish positive relationships between team members, managers and supervisors.