



The Midland Health Board (MHB) is made up of 58 sites – each one effectively representing an SME. The objective of the WHP project is to improve employee health through stress reduction and prevention (on-site, work process related) and to improve their lifestyle. Reduced absenteeism is another objective.

Converse to the way such projects normally operate, MHB intends to use the experiences and practical knowledge generated by this project in order to adopt an entirely apt programme for its large organisations (hospitals).

Project partners

The MHB WHP project is a partnership between the Department of Health and Midland Health Board enjoying support from a private research consultancy. Additional benefits will accrue from the expertise to be made available by the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

Developing effective procedures

The project features a number of successful strategies, notably a co-operative partnership approach between public and private sectors. Internally, the project demonstrates the importance of organisation-wide support structures for the success of WHP. An action group was formed, thus ensuring that the project has adequate support structures throughout. The project is well grounded, being based on a thorough needs assessment, which identified action priorities in the areas of stress reduction and

employee lifestyle improvements. During the course of the project, due attention was paid to the concept of sustainability which was buttressed by employee empowerment. Employees are involved in initiation, planning, and conduct of the WHP project and all related activities. A conscious effort was made to provide all necessary conditions for genuine participation of the staff in the WHP project as the best way to ensure their ownership of the project. In addition, appropriate measures are undertaken to ensure that the project will be sustained in the long run.

Systematic needs analysis

The project action plan was based on careful and comprehensive needs analysis. The main instruments used were research based methods, carried out internally (i.e. qualitative type of research using mainly seminar type discussions and quantitative research using questionnaires to survey the health and lifestyle behaviour of the MHB staff). In addition, various documentary research techniques were used to complement the above. One of the products is the audit of sick leave conducted in selected locations.

Establishment of co-operation and communication structures

One of the earliest sets of activities to be undertaken was to establish co-operation and communication structures for the WHP project. Thus a network has been built of people with an interest and stake in the health improvement process. Another integral part of this process was to raise awareness regarding the rationale and relevance of health improvement and to communicate and promote the whole concept of the WHP project. All appropriate channels and reporting relationships for the project were established at an early stage. The initial announcements were made using letters, meetings, posters and poster addendum to payslips (so-called "pay stuffers") where the target audience receives information together with their pay cheque or pay slip. Further details on the project were communicated using newsletters, presentations, seminars and workshops.

Information on project objectives

There are two main project objectives, which are of immediate concern, as identified during the needs analysis phase. The first one concerns stress management/reduction/prevention on site which could be classified as primarily work and process related. The other one focuses on employee lifestyle aiming to promote exercise and make

it a standard feature of employee lifestyle. As far as the stress prevention aspect of the project is concerned, it was decided to tackle work stress at the source, dealing with issues such as problems in work relationships and problems due to factors intrinsic to the job. A detailed plan for an exercise programme was worked out and has been implemented. Instructors who could carry out classes were selected. These individuals were given additional training in Health Promotion. As far as particular exercise activities are concerned, hill-walking and circuit training exercises were prioritised, together with stretching exercises. An important aspect of this segment of the project were educational classes, highlighting what constitutes physical activity, benefits of it, and appropriate goal setting. Finally, various motivating techniques and tactics were used, from "one to one" assessment and empowering sessions to peer support / events.

Positive Results

A notably effective feature of the project was its "hands-on" approach, with the emphasis on learning through doing. This, among other things, particularly illustrates the practical value of the thorough methodological approach to the whole project. At the same time, the project has managed to demonstrate the usefulness of the theoretical models used (for exam-

ple, models of health behaviour designed by Prochaska and Clemente applied to physical activity).

Evaluation has already been carried out with respect to the exercise programme, mainly relying on first hand self-reporting by the participants in the programme, with encouraging results. In addition, this segment of the WHP project has been thoroughly examined and analysed, using various theoretical perspectives (e.g. using models of health behaviour applied to physical activity).

Future perspective and commitment

Due attention was paid to the concept of sustainability of the project (which is somewhat related to the previous one of ownership). It was envisaged that the best way to ensure that the project will be self-sustaining was to fully empower employees to participate. This empowerment was achieved through identifying and training employees capable of organising and conducting the required aspects of the project. Of course, this process had to be accompanied by adequate delegation procedures and facilities provision, and could only be conducted in an atmosphere of mutual trust.