

# BHR Academy AHP priorities: Health and Wellbeing



# Project Overview

The Health and Wellbeing of Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) plays a critical role in their ability to deliver high quality care to patients. However, amidst the numerous responsibilities and demands AHPs often face challenges that can affect their personal health and well being.

Data from the BHR Academy Dashboard indicates an increase in sickness rates across the AHP workforce, with podiatrists experiencing the highest rates of sickness followed by radiographers, physiotherapists and occupational therapists.

This report details AHP service leads' thought and experiences about Health and Wellbeing, the health and wellbeing offers available to AHPs across BHR, reflections on why these offers might not be taken up and recommendations for next steps.

This work was carried out in partnership between Care City Innovation CIC and the BHR Academy (who commissioned the work),



# Method

From February to May 2023 to following activities were carried out:

- Review of local and national organisational Health and Wellbeing offers
- Interviews with service leads and other key wellbeing staff
  - 15 service leads participated in interviews, across 13 interviews. These included Service Leads for Adult Community Services, Children Services, Service Leads in Acute services in physical and mental health teams and Leads for OTs in Local Authorities. In addition, the manager of a social care organisation who employs an Occupational Therapist and an AHP support worker was unable to commit to a full interview but did provide insights which have informed this report. Informal conversations were also carried out with Health and Wellbeing leads.
  - Vlad Iorga (Digital Therapeutics & Programme Lead) contributed his insights as lead for the KeepingWellNEL service



# Themes from Interviews



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# Staff Awareness of Health & Wellbeing offers

*"All teams are aware of the wellbeing offers"*

*"Fantastic wellbeing offer - exercise, pilates, mindfulness sessions - counselling"*

These statements were confirmed by a large majority of the service leads interviewed. They further added that health and wellbeing and the offers available are always discussed in team meetings and described the initiatives as comprehensive, covering various aspects of support.

*"Barriers for taking them up is around awareness. Fact that there's so many different things out there that are not brought together in a cohesive, easy to access way"*

One service lead did report that the sheer number of wellbeing offers available could be a hindrance to awareness as it can become confusing.



# Challenges to uptake

*"Health & wellbeing - probably not using it as much as they should. They get support from each other. Other set-ups include peer support informally"*

*"Staff would rather get waiting lists down than look after themselves."*

Accessing Health and Wellbeing offers can be challenging due to sessions being held during the day and not easily accessible to all staff members based on their location. Service Leads reported that staff members recognise the potential benefits of support but believe their time is better spent in clinical contact, and tend to only access services reactively when there is a need.

Service leads also reported that there are cultural differences between services which impacts the uptake of Health and Wellbeing offers. Mental health and corporate services, where wellbeing approaches are more established, are seen to have better uptake.

One service lead commented that a lot of the Health and Wellbeing offers are what people *think* the staff want, and that uptake might be improved by offers being more staff informed and led.



# Staffing and Staff Pressure

*"There is a sense that when there is so much pressure, money is invested in more staff as the thing that would make the biggest change is to be better staffed."*

A significant theme which emerged from the interviews was that of the pressure experienced by AHPs. These pressures can be attributed to staff shortages, large volume waiting lists, and an increasing BHR population and historical staffing levels. These pressures negatively impact staff well-being, potentially leading to higher sickness rates, burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and poor retention. Service leads noted that the pressure experienced by individual AHPs was actually whole-system pressures being concentrated upon the individual delivering care. They also reported that the ever-present pressure of waiting lists and caseloads has also led to staff prioritising reducing waiting lists over their own well-being.

*"There's an awareness that our waiting lists are particularly long and appointments filled weeks in advance, so there is constant awareness of day-to-day pressures on the service."*



# Health and Wellbeing Offers



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# A summary of wellbeing offers

All local authority and NHS organisations across BHR offer a comprehensive framework that supports both the physical health and safety, as well as the mental health, of their employees. Interviews confirmed that whilst offers vary between organisations, it was felt that staff needs are met by the offers.

All organisations offer an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) giving access to confidential guidance on a range of emotional, health and social problems. All AHP staff working in Health and Social Care roles across BHR also have access to KeepingWellNEL which provides a comprehensive, and equitable, wellbeing service to staff across sectors.

A number of additional offers are also available which vary by organisation:

**Financial Wellbeing** - Impartial and confidential money advice, information on how to manage your fuel bill, breathing space - 60 day period of legal protection from creditors. Offers and discounts ViVup, Blue Light Card . Season ticket loans. NHS telephone support line tools and resources from Money Helper Service

**Emotional Wellbeing**- Talking therapies, Mindfulness sessions . Confidential counselling , employment advice, Silver lining – online CBT Programme

**Digital Apps** - Headspace , bright sky , worklife central, Unmind, Zero Suicide Alliance, Stay alive, 12 week digital weight management programme

**Physical** - Cycle to work scheme, Sports Club, Sports Club, Sports Club, Menopause support, NHS digital weight management programme , Staff fast track physio service, 15 minutes desk exercise, cardio workout, pilates, yoga

## **Spiritual and faith based counselling**

**Support Contacts** - Wellbeing Ambassadors, Freedom to Speak up Guardians, Staff Networks

**Webinars**- Menopause, Schwartz rounds, crisis leadership

**Self help resources** - topics covered and tips to cope like stress, bereavement , depression, anxiety



# Health and Wellbeing offers – NHS Trusts

- Health and Wellbeing Teams - coordinating health and wellbeing offers across the trusts and will visit services to offer tailored/service specific sessions.
- Health and Wellbeing ambassadors - assigned members of services who will cascade health and wellbeing offers and lead wellbeing efforts
- Regular health and wellbeing newsletters highlighting offers
- Staff networks - e.g. Ethnic Minority, Disability, Mental Health, LGBTQ+ and Women's
- Bereavement support
- Staff psychology service for those struggling with stress, anxiety or low mood, or would just like someone to speak to
- Peer support sessions and groups
- Signposting to financial support services



# Health and Wellbeing offers – Local Authorities

- Health checks and Free leisure membership at a Council run centres
- Online health and wellbeing resources that offer a combination of personally tailored programmes and general health information and support.
- Staff support and networking groups for BME (Black and Minority Ethnic), Disabled and LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender) employees.
- Free confidential advice and telephone counselling
- Staff yoga, pilates classes and badminton
- Workplace programme - monthly calendar of events that include: mental health, men's health and women's health
- Trained Mental Health First Aiders throughout the organisation
- Occupational Health Support



# Health and Wellbeing offers – Social Care and Primary Care

Due to the relatively small size of these organisations in comparison to NHS trusts and local authorities they lack the same internal Health and Wellbeing structures such as internal offers and dedicated Health and Wellbeing teams. Externally available support is therefore of prime importance, including:

- KeepingWellNEL (now closed)
- EAPs giving access to confidential guidance on a range of emotional, health and social problems
- NHSE support available through their website, including support and guidance specifically designed for Social Care and Primary Care staff



# KeepingWellNEL

Across England, 40 staff mental health and wellbeing hubs were established in response to Covid-19 to provide health and wellbeing support to NHS and social care staff.

The hubs offer rapid access to assessment and local evidence-based mental health services and support where needed. The hub offer is confidential and free of charge for all health and social care staff, from all services and settings. Employees can self-refer or refer a colleague (with their consent).

The hubs can offer a clinical assessment and referral to local services enabling access to support where needed, such as talking therapy or counselling. It is separate and confidential from the employing organisation.

**KeepingWellNEL** is the North East London staff mental health and wellbeing hub which offers enhanced, health, wellbeing and psychological resilience support from Monday to Saturday from 8am to -8pm.



# KeepingWellNEL offers

- Support - a digital chat support service, webinars, and self-help resources, as well as live emotional wellbeing support and a 360-degree wellbeing needs review.
- Confidentiality - The service is committed to providing a safe and confidential listening environment for its users, independent from their employer. The service also offers signposting and navigation to other available support services.
- Inclusivity and accessibility: The service provides an experience that is inclusive, accessible, and reflective of the needs of its users. This includes providing tailored treatment plans that are culturally cohesive and training its Wellbeing Advisors accordingly.

## Wellbeing advisors

Offer independent, confidential employment advice to help where if someone is having difficulties at work that's impacting how they feel in a negative way. This might include:

- difficulties with workplace relationships (eg with a manager, a colleague, or a supervisee), bullying or harassment;
- advice on how to request reasonable adjustments; support if an individual is subject to a grievance or disciplinary;
- Return to Work Plans; helping clients return to work earlier and promoting stabilisation at work.
- Information, advice and guidance on workplace issues like disputes, pay, sickness, flexibility.
- Managing mental/physical health at work, stress, resilience.



# KeepingWellNEL – closure

**As a result of withdrawal of funding, the KeepingWellNEL (KWNEL) workforce wellbeing service was closed on 28th June 2024. Limited static wellbeing resources are still available online: <https://keepingwellnel.nhs.uk/>**

This is a significant blow to the provision of Health and Wellbeing offers to AHPs across the system, particularly as this service gave equality of access to AHPs across all sectors. Particularly affected will be AHPs in Social Care and primary care settings who have access to less health and wellbeing provision. This issue also extends beyond AHPs as many employees of social care have zero hours contracts, so would not be able to access health and wellbeing offers through their employers, however whatever the individual's role and contract they were able to access the services and resources provided by KeepingWellNEL.



# Discussion



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# Creating a health and wellbeing culture

Dame Carol Black, the Chair of the NHS Expert Advisory Board on Employee Health and Wellbeing highlights in the updated NHS Health and Wellbeing Strategic Overview, that prioritising the health and wellbeing of the diverse NHS Workforce is crucial in delivering high quality patient care. She suggests that if health and wellbeing of NHS employees is made a fundamental part of the Service's DNA, it will enable them to give priority to patients.

Interviews, and review of health and wellbeing offers across BHR, suggest that a lack of suitable offers is not the central issue to AHP wellbeing across BHR and that health and wellbeing is being prioritised across the system. The main issues are:

- The ability for staff to access health and wellbeing offers, and to access it sooner (particularly psychological support)
- Waiting list culture, workforce shortages and staff pressure
- The uncertainty of consistent funding to maintain KeepingWellNEL



# Equity of offers across sectors

With the closure of the KeepingWellNEL service there is an inequity of health and wellbeing offers available to AHPs across primary, secondary, social and voluntary care services. A joint response is required from across the system to address this inequity:

- A business case, and collective pressure from across the system, to be put to NEL ICB to continue funding for KeepingWellNEL
- Better resourced organisations (NHS trusts and Local Authorities) should consider extending their Health and Wellbeing offers to the, relatively few, AHPs which sit outside these organisations in BHR to support the integrated system.



# Allowing and encouraging access

Whilst service leads and managers have expressed satisfaction with the range of Health and Wellbeing offers which are available to their teams, they have noted that there are practical and cultural barriers to these offers being accessed and being accessed early enough to prevent further issues. Addressing these issues will require a co-production approach with staff:

- Co-design services with AHPs: Involving AHPs in the development and evaluation of health and wellbeing services can help ensure that the resources are tailored to their specific needs and preferences. AHPs on the ground should have a voice in shaping services to enhance their effectiveness and accessibility.
- Support line managers : Line managers play a crucial role in supporting their teams' wellbeing. Ongoing guidance and training to be provided to help them effectively support their teams, have sensitive conversations and refer people to expert help when needed. KeepingWellNel was offering excellent training.
- Ensure that Health and Wellbeing offers are promoted, and can be accessed, through a single channel to reduce confusing messaging.



# Addressing staff pressure

During all interviews a constant theme was the impact of increased workloads and stress due to several factors. Firstly, the burden of waiting lists hang over staff and the size of the AHP teams, which is often based on historical measures, fails to account for the growing population in need of services . Additionally the people needing support from therapists, have much more complex needs than a decade ago and hence the need for greater and consistent support from AHPs working in the community.

- To address these challenges it's crucial to recognise that the burden on AHP teams is a result of systemic issues within the health and care system, rather than individual shortcomings. This perspective shift will be necessary in addressing the experience of waiting list pressures and their prioritisation over personal wellbeing and accessing support. An improved understanding of the whole health and care system (through bringing together commissioners, health and care staff to discuss their roles and shared challenges) would support this.
- Innovative approaches to workforce recruitment and retention (see interviews report) must be considered to address the AHP vacancy rate, and in turn reduce the pressure and stress experienced by current staff.



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