GUIDELINES TO SHIPPING COMPANIES ON MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

NATIONAL MARITIME OCCUPATIONAL
HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

UK CHAMBER
of SHIPPING

NAUTILUS
INTERNATIONAL

RMT

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Mental illness is estimated to cost UK businesses £30billion every year, through lost production, recruitment and absence. The Office of National Statistics has reported that one in six adults will be experiencing a mental health problem at any one time. The chances of members of ships' crews being affected are therefore statistically high – and may be exacerbated by particular aspects of seafaring, such as separation from family and isolation.

1.2 The terms "mental health" and "mental illness" refer to the social, psychological and emotional well-being of individuals. Mental illnesses, which include conditions such as depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorder, anorexia nervosa, obsessive-compulsive disorder, psychosis and schizophrenia, may be less visible than many physical disabilities but their effects on affected individuals can be very serious. Sometimes they manifest themselves as alcohol or drug dependency – meaning that employers and their advisers should seek to identify the root causes of the more visible detrimental effects.

1.3 In some cases seafarers who suffer from mental illness may be deemed unfit for work; in others, appropriate action by employers may have beneficial effects on the seafarer's well-being and their work performance.

1.4 The UK Chamber of Shipping, Nautilus International and the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) have jointly agreed the following guidelines to shipping companies on drawing up policies on mental health and mental illness. Companies are recommended to adopt such policies; if they already have policies in place, they are recommended to review them in the light of these guidelines.

2.
AIMS

2.1 The aims of shipping companies' policies on mental health and mental illness should include:

• To promote the health, safety and welfare of seafarers

• To foster a company culture that is conducive to improving the mental health of seafarers

• To ensure awareness of the importance of good mental health among company managers

• To provide support for staff who are identified as having mental health problems, ensuring that they are treated with sympathy and respect and in confidence

• To increase awareness among all staff of the potential signs of mental health problems

• To provide training to staff in having conversations with others about their mental health.

3.
THE POLICY

3.1 The policy should be in writing and should:

• Designate a director as having overall responsibility for the policy, whilst indicating the commitment from the full management board to the policy

• Indicate concern for the health, safety and welfare of seafarers and others in the company

• Promulgate positive messages to staff indicating that the company promotes the good mental health of all staff, thereby fostering a supportive company culture

• Provide literature via noticeboards and/or company intranet to promote awareness of the benefits of personal interaction and communication to good mental health

• Provide details of persons within and external to the company who are trained in listening to persons wishing to discuss their state of mental health.

3.2 The policy should make clear that the company recognises that mental health problems may be short-term, long-term or permanent. It should not focus solely on remedial measures for seafarers suffering mental health problems, but on improving the mental health of all its seafarers.

3.3 The policy should promote to a workplace environment that is conducive to good mental health, including management styles that treat seafarers with respect and value their opinions and eliminating harassment and bullying.

3.4 The policy should promote the organisation of social and team-building events that are inclusive and open to all and encourage all employees to contribute ideas for these. It should also encourage volunteering and other out-of-work activities that can contribute to improving mental health.

3.5 The policy should also make clear the company's commitment to overcoming and eliminating any culture of silence or stigma that might exist over mental health. This could be done by discussing the subject openly in individual and staff meetings.

4.
IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 The company should consider providing free access to external sources of support for seafarers, whom they can contact in confidence. These may include maritime trade unions, seafarer welfare organisations or organisations specialising in the provision of support to those with mental health problems.

4.2 The company should adopt procedures for making reasonable adjustments to working arrangements for seafarers who are identified as suffering from mental health problems or who are returning to work after absence resulting from a mental health problem. These may include:

    • Ensuring that there is a colleague on board who is trained and willing to act as the seafarer's confidant

    • Offering access to specialist external support

    • Phasing a return to work

Where a seafarer has been declared temporarily unfit for sea service by an approved doctor, actions to support the seafarer's return to work should take into account any information from the certifying doctor.

4.3 The company should consult, where appropriate, the maritime trade unions and obtain their support for the policy and the company's commitment to the promotion of good mental health.

5. TRAINING

5.1 The following factors may indicate a mental health problem in a person:

- Changes in their behaviour or mood
- Changes in their effectiveness at work
- An inability to focus or make decisions
- Changes in eating habits
- Signs of excessive alcohol use or drug use (not limited to illegal drugs).

5.2 The company should provide, or arrange, training for management-level personnel onboard ships and ashore in recognising signs of mental health problems, facilitating discussions in staff meetings about mental health and having sensitive and supportive conversations with sufferers of mental health problems.

6. ASSISTANCE AND TREATMENT

6.1 Where a seafarer is suspected of having, or has been identified as having, a mental health problem a member of the company's management who has been given appropriate training for the task should arrange a meeting with the seafarer. The meeting should take place in confidence and the seafarer should be encouraged to talk, without time constraints. The manager should ask open questions to allow the seafarer to express themselves as they choose and to reveal as much – or as little – information as they wish. Follow-up meeting may be necessary.

6.2 Should the manager believe that further support is needed, the seafarer should be encouraged to make an appointment with their General Practitioner. An appointment should also be made

with an Approved Doctor to determine whether the seafarer's medical status should be changed. In the event that the seafarer is declared temporarily unfit for sea service, the company should reassure the seafarer that their job will be kept open for them to return once they are cleared to do so by an approved Doctor. Should the seafarer be declared permanently unfit for sea service, the company should use its best endeavours to offer suitable alternative employment.

7. MONITORING

7.1 The company should undertake regular consultations with and surveys of their seafarers to seek information on their mental health and wellbeing. These should include questions as to their working conditions, communications with colleagues, work life balance, staff support and work-related or other causes of stress. Where concerns are identified, the company should prepare and implement action plans to address these.

7.2 The company should periodically evaluate its approach to mental health and identify areas for further development, reporting back on its progress to all seafarers.

7.3 The company should take suitable opportunities to share its approaches with other companies, with the aim of sharing good practice and acquiring new ideas.

Sources of further information

Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Management Standards
http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/

Business in the Community Mental Health Toolkit for Employers,
in association with Public Health England
https://wellbeing.bitc.org.uk/sites/default/files/mental_health_to
olkit_for_employers_-_small.pdf