Tips to protect your physical and mental health

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Feeling the anxiety rising? Here are some simple ideas for protecting both your physical and mental health, and that of your employees.

In the pressured environment of financial services, it’s easy to feel trapped between volatile investment markets, client expectations and a rapidly changing business environment.

And it’s not just advisers feeling the squeeze.

Practice managers need to be conscious of safeguarding not just their own wellbeing, but also that of their staff, as they’re often in the firing line for angry or anxious clients.

Around Australia, work-related mental health conditions are a growing concern due to their negative impact on individual employees and the flow-on costs of the long periods away from work associated with them.

According to Safe Work Australia, work-related mental health conditions now represent around 6% of workers’ compensation claims each year, totalling approximately $543 million.

Looking after mental health

It’s an issue advisers need to act on, according to Aimee Gayed, PhD candidate and Black Dog Institute researcher with the Workplace Mental Health Research Team.

“It’s important for financial advisers in managerial positions to look after their own mental health and to ensure they promote the mental health of the staff they supervise,” she says.

Overlooking mental health issues can come at a high price.

“Negative outcomes include extended periods of sick leave, high staff turnover, isolation or withdrawal from the team and poor levels of work output,” explains Gayed.

Exercise to cut stress

Protecting your physical fitness is also linked to good mental health.

Research has repeatedly shown exercise can reduce stress and the symptoms of mental health conditions like depression and anxiety, whilst also boosting your work performance.

The Department of Health’s healthdirect initiative urges Australians to get active to boost their overall wellbeing:

“Exercise has many benefits, not only for your physical health but also your mental health. In your brain,
exercise stimulates chemicals that improve your mood, and the part of the brain responsible for memory and learning.”

It’s also important to get sufficient sleep, as research shows a clear link between sleep and mental health. Poor sleeping patterns have been linked to poorer current and future mental health across all age groups.\(^2\)

**Helping your employees**

Advisers need to be conscious of safeguarding the wellbeing of their staff.

“When work-related mental health risk factors are appropriately managed and the mental health needs of workers are met, it leads to better health outcomes and productivity for workers, reduction in absenteeism rates, and boosted levels of morale and performance across the organisation,” explains Gayed.

Implementing preventative strategies – such as giving employees a greater sense of control over their jobs and providing them with increased support so they can efficiently carry out their duties – can make a big difference.

So can building rapport through regular one-on-one catch-up sessions.

“This allows for checking in on wellbeing to become a natural part of the conversation. Thus, mental health issues become easier to discuss,” says Gayed.

“Managers play a key role in protecting the mental health of the staff they supervise.”

It’s also important to recognise as an employer you have legal responsibilities.

“Regardless of whether the cause of an employee’s episode of mental ill-health was work-related or not, managers and employers have a legal obligation to help support employees’ recovery and reduce the workplace risk factors that may impact or exacerbate their illness,” notes Gayed.

**7 simple ideas for protecting your mental and physical health**

1. **Take time out** – focus on life outside the practice. Make other activities and social experiences a priority.
2. **Look after your body** – ensure you eat well, drink plenty of water, exercise regularly and get enough sleep.
3. **Think about your staff** – give them opportunities to debrief and feel supported. Show leadership and allow your staff to talk about their experiences.
4. **Avoid isolation and ask for help if you need it** – be prepared to show your vulnerabilities. Talk to others and share your concerns.
5. **Improve your sleep hygiene** – establish a regular bedtime and wake time, relax before bed, avoid electronic devices and stimulants like coffee before bed.
6. **Quiet your mind** – try mediating, mindfulness or relaxation activities as these can improve your
state of mind and outlook on life.

7. **Set realistic goals** – decide what you want to achieve professionally and personally. Aim high but be realistic.

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