

Expert thinking on critical issues

SAFETY4SEA, in association with the North of England P&I Club, discusses topical industry issues.

Q: “Is the increased focus on mental health ashore also changing attitudes at sea?”



John Webb
Senior Executive
(Claims), The North of
England P&I Club

Yes The increased focus on mental health issues globally has contributed to a greater understanding of the psychological problems faced by many seafarers. But the early signs are encouraging for our industry. A search of the website of many P&I Clubs and seafarers organizations will reveal a plethora of mental health resources which were not available five years ago. The greater awareness of mental health issues has fostered a genuine willingness by stakeholders to support seafarers, either through the provision of resources onboard and ashore or the provision of dedicated confidential telephone helplines. Whilst attitudes towards mental health issues are changing, there is still a long way to go for the shipping industry.



Helen Sampson
Director, Seafarers
International Research
Centre, School of
Social Sciences,
Cardiff University

I hope so There are lessons from land-based research, on the relationship between the built environment and human well-being, that need to be carried over to the shipboard context. We know, for example, that fatigue correlates with anxiety/depression and that noise, temperature, and vibration, all impact negatively on sleep quality. It is less well-known that the fabric of the built environment also impact on mental well-being. Contemporary seafarers have limited access to shore-leave which has serious implications for their physical fitness and mental well-being. It is therefore essential that facilities for shipboard recreation are provided and that operators do not solely rely on the promotion of ‘resilience-building’ strategies amongst seafarers.



Mark O'Neil
President,
Columbia Marlow
Shipmanagement

Yes What we think and feel, and how we behave (i.e our mental health), is far more openly discussed onboard than in the past. With the increased focus on the Human Element as a critical factor and consideration in performance enhancement, and the application of ever more sophisticated Human Resource techniques onboard and ashore, it is no longer pretended that mental health issues do not occur (or only infrequently occur). Alongside increased awareness of the issue by crewmembers (who are critical in the identification of the first signs of any mental health issues), we at CSM are working closely with experts to provide training on identification, support and basic therapy/first aid.



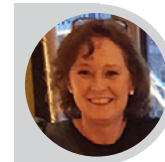
Johan Smith
Wellness Project
Manager,
Sailors' Society

Yes A better shore-based understanding of mental health not only brings improved awareness to the maritime space but also advances knowledge about the factors that influence mental health in the workplace. This awareness is spilling over into the maritime industry, as we can see through the growing interest from shipping companies in initiatives such as Sailors' Society's Wellness at Sea programme. We still have a long way to go, but we are seeing positive signs and for our part we will continue to raise awareness of the importance of seafarer mental health both within and outside the industry.



Ray Barker
Head of Operations,
ISWAN

Yes I think the turning point in the UK was the soldiers returning home after the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the issue of mental health, particularly PTSD started to be discussed openly. That made it easier for others to talk about mental health; over the last 18 months or so in the UK almost every week there is a celebrity or ordinary member of the public talking openly about a mental health issue. This has raised awareness of mental health issues generally and because people are being more open about it, it is making it an easier subject to talk about. This has in turn made it easier for seafarers and has raised the profile of mental health for shipping companies as well.



Sarah Honebon
Research Officer,
Warsash School of
Maritime Science and
Engineering, Solent
University

Maybe The focus on mental health ashore is definitely infiltrating conversations surrounding mental health at sea. However, what could be considered rather dangerous is the lack of research & sound evidence that demonstrates facts. Seafaring is culturally & logistically complex, so consistent, affordable and accessible healthcare is challenging. All our attitudes are changing towards mental health, but questions remain unanswered. Where are the industry vulnerabilities? What preventative measures can support industry members? ‘Mental health’, despite being talked about more freely, still carries stigma. Research and education are key to ensure the industry is better placed to deal with it.



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