

5th October 2006

Dear Colleague

Re: Action on stigma - Promoting mental health, ending discrimination

I am writing to let you know about a new initiative that the Department of Health is planning to launch on World Mental Health Day (10th October 2006) and to seek your support.

Called 'Action on Stigma', the aim of the new initiative is to help organisations change the way they deal with mental health issues.

The Government believes that employers have a key role to play in helping reduce the impact of mental illness by changing the way they think about the issue and making a positive commitment to:

- Help staff to maintain their mental wellbeing
- Support employees if they develop a problem
- Make sure their employees understand mental health issues
- Not discriminate against an employee or customer because they have a mental health problem.

We also believe that if employers play their part, their organisations, as well as their staff will benefit from a more positive work culture. This in turn will improve customer service to people with mental health problems. Organisations will also avoid contravening the Disability Discrimination Act.

Regional projects are already proving their worth by increasing awareness of mental health at work and providing support for businesses in recruiting and retaining staff. We now need to replicate this success across England.

The Government's Health Work and Wellbeing Programme has already announced a charter that organisations can sign up to, to improve the health of employees. This new initiative, called 'Action on Stigma', will build on this specifically for mental health issues by:

- Providing a set of core principles that employers should seek to meet
- Developing a systematic process that employers can follow
- Providing information, advice and support to employers via eight regional employment support teams

On World Mental Health Day (WMHD), we will set out the vision for the programme, the core set of principles, and the benefits that employers will gain from implementing them. We will highlight best practice and will set out the timetable for delivery. We will also announce the beginning of a 'listening exercise' to find out the views of employers and the support they think they will need to adopt the principles.

The Government believes that it needs to get its own house in order and so the first organisations that will be targeted are those working in the public sector, specifically the NHS.

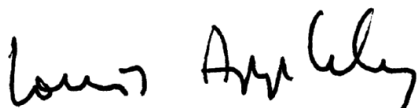
The publication of the principles will be followed by a period of discussion with employers about how the initiative can best be delivered in different parts of the country. This 'listening' exercise will be followed by the publication of an action plan in the Spring of 2007.

We very much hope that you will support this initiative and work with us to reduce the stigma and discrimination directed towards people with mental health problems in the workplace.

A copy of 'Action on Stigma' will be sent to you next Tuesday following the formal launch.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Gary Hogman from the Care Services Improvement Partnership on T: 020 7902 1972
E: gary.hogman@csip.org.uk.

Yours sincerely,



Louis Appleby
National Director for Mental Health