



# Time to get on top of our mental health



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**T**he Government recently released the findings of a wide-ranging inquiry into mental health and addiction and while a lot of the media focus is on what's going to be done to improve the provision of public mental health services, there's an important aspect of the report that will inevitably be overlooked. Unfortunately, this aspect is actually of most relevance to everyday people, including many within the road transport industry.

The report clearly makes the point that mental health problems cannot be fixed by the Government and the health system alone. Our mental health system is designed to respond to people diagnosed with mental illness. By its very nature, it's not responsive enough to properly assist other people who are distressed and going through a tough time. This isn't surprising. We can't medicate or treat our way through all the mental distress that may affect us in our everyday lives.

While the Government can and does make a big impact in making sure there's professional help available, the fact is that as a society, we can do more to look after each other on a daily basis and there's no better place to start than in the workplace.

Mental health is one of my big focusses over the coming year in the

health and safety area of the business I work in. It's often overlooked and definitely always underrated as a potential risk in the workplace. How many of us that are involved in the morning's toolbox meeting can recall mental health issues ever being brought up?

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Working in the road transport industry includes certain features of the job that are well-known to cause mental distress. Loneliness out on the road, being away from home for significant periods of time, and the pressure to get the job completed within a specific timeframe can all lead to mental distress and anxiety. Of course, there are also the normal business pressures related to cash flow, servicing debt, and capital depreciation that owner-drivers and

company owners in our industry have to contend with every day. Wellness is a term that's used a lot in mental healthcare and I know that many people just roll their eyes when they hear it. Unfortunately, it's frequently associated with woolly connotations and mental images of zen-like Tibetan meditation and Bikram yoga sessions but it's a far more practical concept. Sleep, nutrition, physical exercise, and time spent outdoors can all help our personal wellness and the recovery from mental distress and personal pressure.

Along with promoting these wellness activities, one of the things we can do to help people dealing with mental distress is to just listen to what they have to say and not assume that we have all the answers. In many respects, having a friend or a colleague take an interest in and being available to talk through a problem in a non-judgemental way often goes a long way to helping someone overcome the mental anxiety they are suffering from.

At the very least, it feels good to share your problems and hear that other people often go through similar things. Supportive colleagues and bosses can in this way make a big difference to the lives of workmates going through a tough time. This in-turn benefits everyone by making the workplace happier and safer. ■