

THE REGULATORY OBLIGATION TO MANAGE AND CONTROL PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS AND RISK FOR CLIENT FACING TEAMS – FACTORS TO CONSIDER

CLIENT FACING TEAMS

Accidental
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Work/Occupational Health and Safety Regulations have been (or will imminently be) amended across the States and Territories of Australia to include specific requirements around managing psychosocial hazards and risk in all workplaces. Employers are now required, amongst other things, to:

- Understand what is meant by a Psychosocial Hazard
- Understand what is meant by a Psychosocial Risk
- Manage those risks, and
- Implement control measures.

The purpose of control measures is to either eliminate, or at least minimise, psychosocial risks when avoidance of the hazard is not possible due to the nature of the team or the role.

The Amendments refer to a number of relevant factors to consider when determining the control measures that need to be put into place, including:

- Duration, frequency and severity of exposure to the hazard
- The manner in which hazards may interact or combine
- The design and systems of work, and
- The information, training and instruction given to workers.

Those working in client facing roles are frequently exposed to psychosocial hazards. Many of these hazards will interact, however their impact can be substantially reduced with the correct training, systems of work, approach, frameworks, policies and processes in place.

It is well recognised that those who work in client facing teams, particularly given the impacts of Covid-19, spiralling cost of living, natural disasters

and increased interest rates, are frequently engaging with, and exposed to the psychosocial hazards, of customers who are in vulnerable circumstances, angry, abusive, overwhelmed or in crisis. The associated risks of compassion fatigue, secondary or vicarious trauma and burnout are health and safety issues about which the

employer needs to be aware and must manage and control.

Combining her experiences as a solicitor and also volunteer crisis supporter on Lifeline's 13 11 14 suicide prevention and crisis intervention line, Cutty Felton of Accidental Counsellor Pty Ltd developed her unique and well-known approach and frameworks which are well placed to meet the obligations of employers to manage and control some of the most common psychosocial risks being experienced by your client facing teams, particularly given their exposure to those clients who are agitated, aggressive or struggling.

Core to her ethical and empathic approach is an understanding of the necessity for, and impact of, maintaining Boundaries. At all times, and especially in the face of potential psychosocial hazard, it is imperative that the three critical boundaries (of the role, of the conversation with the client and as provided by policy/procedure) are maintained, ensuring that safety of both the client and the team member are the overriding priority.

For those psychosocial hazards that cannot be eliminated, skills to reduce their impact and information as to how and from whom to obtain support when needed, are an important aspect of her program.

Robust examination of expectations placed on employees, as well as organisational policies and processes and whether they enhance the safety of (or inadvertently increase the risk to) the team member, are an additional crucial aspect to be considered.

Cutty welcomes the Work/ Occupational Health and Safety Amendments, recognising as they do that psychosocial hazards and risks are WHS/OHS issues to be managed and controlled, rather than simply 'wellbeing' or 'resilience' matters which are often considered to be the ultimate responsibility of the employee, a major barrier to their seeking support when exposed to psychosocial hazard and risk in the workplace.

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