



Greater openness about mental health

Poor mental health is becoming increasingly prevalent at Danish workplaces, but targeted initiatives can strengthen employees' physical and mental wellbeing.

By Kristine Seest

In ten years – from 2013 to 2023 – the number of Danes with 'high stress levels' has increased from 21.3 to 31.5 percent, and Danes with 'poor mental health' has increased from 10.7 to 18.3 percent. This is according to the report 'The Health of Danes 2023' from the Danish Institute of Public Health.

At GLS Denmark, they have made a concerted effort to improve the mental health of their employees.

»Mental wellbeing is a societal problem that is costly on a number of levels. It is a problem that we as a company would like to address and take responsibility for, which is why we have intensified our efforts to strengthen employee wellbeing,« says HR Manager Mette Wienberg from GLS.

GLS is now focusing on mental wellbeing with the goal of creating a work environment where employees feel valued and motivated to do their best. Their efforts aim to strengthen job satisfaction, promote an open culture and reduce stress and sickness absence. WTW has been part of the process, mapping the overall injury trends at GLS and helping to develop a business case that has put wellbeing and sickness absence higher up on the management agenda.

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HR Manager, GLS Denmark

A financial helping hand

The efforts at GLS are targeted at their more than 400 salaried employees who work in day, evening and night shifts in sedentary office environments at ten different locations in Denmark. The first part of the process involved collecting and processing data, presenting the business case to senior management and applying for

funding. Next, it was a matter of getting the entire organization on board with the various initiatives, and now the follow-up assessment and documentation of the effect of the initiatives awaits.

»Mia, who is our permanent advisor at WTW, has taken a very active part in the entire process, and she has been an excellent link between us and our insurance and pension companies. She has given us this purpose, which has been helpful both internally and in terms of external financing and bringing the different parties together around the table,« says Mette Wienberg.

The health insurance has provided new opportunities for action

One of the first things, GLS has done, is to introduce a mandatory, employer-paid health insurance for all employees. Previously, employees had to actively opt-in and pay to be covered by the health insurance.

»When an employee was not covered by the health insurance and was facing problems in life, we as a company did not have much to do. As a manager, you did not have much room for maneuver, and that was a problem,« says Mette Wienberg and continues:

»Now that everyone is covered by health insurance, our managers can refer an employee with challenges to relevant counselling and treatment. A manager doesn't have to act as a psychologist in order to take good care of the employees. That is one part of the equation. The other is that our employees now have the opportunity to get professional help in situations where life is difficult,« says Mette Wienberg.

Now you can talk openly about problems

Recognizing the importance of mental health for a productive and engaged workforce has led GLS to focus on the prevention and treatment of mental health challenges. Under the banner of 'A Healthier GLS', they have joined forces across the organization to promote a mental health culture.

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Hanne Skov Elgaard
Customer Service Manager, GLS Denmark

GLS has invited employees to talks on mental wellbeing, introduced a mental health week and fitness breaks during the day, and has made a major effort to raise awareness of the counselling and treatment services available to employees. Among other things, GLS has launched a website that makes it easy for employees to get inspiration and an overview of their options if they are facing wellbeing challenges – including the counselling hotlines that employees can use through their pension scheme if they have problems with mental or physical wellbeing.

»There is a stronger focus on the fact that it is not just work-related issues that affect wellbeing at work. We are whole people, and everyone in our organization should know that they can get help if, for example, they are in a

situation where their child has serious problems,« says Manager in Customer Service Hanne Skov Elgaard, who is also chairman of the Working Environment for Offices in GLS and one of the protagonists behind 'A healthier GLS', and continues:

»The visibility we have created around employee counselling has in itself helped change the culture. It is no longer so hush-hush to talk about these topics, and compared to before, we now talk to each other much more about the things that can hurt in life,« says Hanne Skov Elgaard.

Opening up

The counsellors at WTW Corporate Health & Wellbeing are familiar with this problem. They find that many companies want to contribute to good employee wellbeing, but that it can be difficult to find ways to talk about topics related to mental wellbeing.

»When we facilitate internal programs for our clients, we find that once the topic is opened, a confidential space is quickly created and the things that affect wellbeing in everyday life are discussed openly. Many people have something on their minds, and there is a strong consensus that wellbeing in everyday life is important for everyone. The trick is to turn the many good intentions and suggestions into concrete action and results,« says senior specialist Maria Ebbesen from WTW Corporate Health & Wellbeing.

The specialists then help to collate the constructive suggestions and advise the company on how to prioritize, finance and implement changes in the organization.

It is okay to laugh together

At GLS, they have introduced physical exercise as an option during working hours in sedentary office environments. It is an initiative that is aimed at preventing musculoskeletal injuries, but also about the collegiate community.

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Maria Ebbesen
Senior Specialist, WTW

»We have received a lot of positive feedback on our online group training program, where we have done the exercises at different locations with our webcams turned on. It has given us some good laughs, which has definitely had a positive impact on our sense of community,« says Mette Wienberg.

She emphasizes that despite an existing annual mental health wheel with regular activities, it is necessary to continuously develop new initiatives to maintain and renew awareness and commitment to mental health. That is why GLS is working to further

develop their exercise program to continue to motivate and engage their employees to reduce sedentary time. Their future program includes video exercises and gamification, utilizing elevating desks, exercise elastic bands and optional exercises.