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RMT

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR SHIPPING COMPANIES ON IMPROVING MENTAL WELLBEING

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

The National Maritime Occupational Health and Safety Committee (NMOHSC) issued guidelines to shipping companies on mental health awareness in 2018. The purpose of this document is to set out practical steps that companies may wish to take to promote the mental wellbeing of their employees. It is focused principally on seafarers but some parts of the guidance may be equally applicable to shore personnel.

The NMOHSC does not endorse the examples as part of industry wide implementation but presents them as practical steps that have proven beneficial to seafarer wellbeing in the specific circumstances where they have been applied.

2 MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

Much like physical health we all have mental health, both of which can change over time. Therefore, it is important to recognise that our mental wellbeing can fluctuate from feeling mentally well to mentally unwell. Mostly, we can manage our mental health by integrating positive practices to sustain a healthy mental state. It is possible for shipping companies to aid this and counterbalance negative stressors that might impact a person's wellbeing.

Sometimes a mental health condition might need a diagnosis. People with a diagnosed mental illness can cope well and experience positive mental health.

Most episodes of mental ill health are short lived and there are different types of early interventions that can help when a person is experiencing mild symptoms. Early intervention and a holistic approach to wellbeing can negate more serious harm to the individual and those around them. As such, nurturing a working environment that is conducive to good mental health, reduces stigma and encourages peer support is necessary.

3   A COMPANY CULTURE THAT PROMOTES GOOD MENTAL WELLBEING

The best performing organisations are those where staff are healthy, motivated and focused. Where employees are valued and supported and feel that their work is meaningful and they have a stake in the success of the company, they are likely to have higher levels of mental wellbeing, as well as showing greater commitment and performing more effectively. This relationship between levels of staff wellbeing and motivation and business performance is often called "employee engagement".

Business benefits include:

- enhanced loyalty
- enhanced commitment
- enhanced morale
- greater innovation
- improved safety
- higher productivity
- greater profitability
- reductions in sickness absence

Fostering such a culture requires commitment from senior management that is visible, role modelled and communicated regularly. It involves encouraging fairness, teamwork, collaboration, information-sharing, listening to staff and earning – rather than demanding – their respect and trust.

Practical Example.

A company published a comprehensive free resource for staff entitled "Care for People" which visibly demonstrated to the workforce that their wellbeing was a priority and promoted positive Mental Health alongside reducing stigma.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT

Companies should view the promotion of good mental wellbeing in the same way as any other health, safety or welfare issue – by undertaking risk assessments. Mental health difficulties have a wide variety of causes and many of these will be outside of a company's control. However, where there are factors affecting mental wellbeing that are under the company's control, the company should identify hazards i.e. any elements of working conditions, or characteristics of the workplace, that may have a negative impact on mental wellbeing. It should then consider who may be harmed, along with how. Having assessed the risks, possibly by using an appropriate risk assessment tool (see **Annex A**), the company should act in line with a recognised risk management plan.

Wherever possible, companies should take steps to avoid the risks. This could be achieved by making changes to systems of work or living and working conditions to circumvent the risk.

If avoiding the risk is not possible or reasonably practicable, efforts should focus on controlling, mitigating, modifying or reducing the threat impact or likelihood (or both) through intermediate steps.

Should there be no reasonably practicable means of controlling or mitigating a risk, the company should take steps to minimise the adverse consequences that might arise from it. This may involve transferring the management of the risk to a third party or parties, if they are in the best position to manage the outcomes.

Whenever carrying out risk assessments, the company should take a record of the findings and review the risk assessment at appropriate intervals.

These risk assessment and risk management principles can be applied to mental wellbeing. Workplace conditions that may have a negative impact should be identified and the above principles of risk assessment applied to them. It should be kept in mind that some conditions may affect certain crew members more acutely than others. Because of this, the company should consider implementing individualised as well as collective solutions.

Certain aspects of a seafarer's life may impact negatively on mental health and will be difficult, if not impossible to change – long periods away from home, isolation, long working hours and climatic variations associated with different parts of the world. However, it may

be possible to make changes that might improve a seafarer's mental condition. Companies should consider implementing the following measures to help bring these to light:

- Consultations with crew members
- Training for seafarers in identifying and recognising stressful situations
- Post-sick leave return to work interviews
- Staff suggestion schemes and surveys

Workplace conditions that should be examined include (but will not necessarily be limited to):

- Tours of duty
- Shift patterns
- Frequency of port calls
- Availability of shore leave
- Crew accommodation
- Recreational facilities
- On-board food and catering
- Communication facilities including internet access
- Quality of shipboard management
- "Macho" culture, or a culture where harassment and bullying take place unchecked
- Crew composition

Practical Example.

A seafarer was having difficulty sleeping and this was impacting negatively on their mental wellbeing. Following a consultation with their General Practitioner, they requested a change to their roster. They had been working a repeating pattern involving one week of day work, followed by one week off, then one week of night work and then one further week off.

This was changed so they had less frequent adjustments between their day/night work. Their pattern became one week of day work, followed by one week off, then a further week of day work followed by one week off, then one week of night work, followed by one week off, then a further week of night work followed by one week off. The seafarer was able to sleep better and experienced improved mental health.

5 SHIPBOARD ENVIRONMENT

Good quality comfortable crew accommodation which enables seafarers to make the most of their time off and obtain restful sleep, as well as recreational facilities appropriate for the ship's size and trading pattern.

Physical exercise is linked to mental wellbeing. Seafarers should be encouraged to do what they can to avoid a sedentary lifestyle where practicable.

Practical Example.

A company implemented upgrade initiatives including refurbishment of crew accommodation when dry docking as well as annual reviews of equipment and standardization of what needs to be on board.

6 FATIGUE

Fatigue mitigation and management is not simply a matter of compliance with regulations on minimum hours of rest. There is a wide range of factors that can mitigate or exacerbate seafarer fatigue and these are taken account of in the IMO's Guidelines on Fatigue Mitigation and Management[1]. Resource management can be a problem: sometimes senior officers are overburdened whilst juniors are under-utilised.

Practical Examples.

1. A company introduced electronic tools to their vessels to manage hours of work and rest. This reduced additional paperwork for the seafarer.

2. A company issued quarterly articles for its crews on how to manage fatigue.

1   MSC.1/Circ.1598, 24 January 2019

7 SOCIAL INTERACTION

There are many reports from seafarers stating that they feel isolated when on board. The tendency for seafarers to spend a lot of their rest time alone in their bunks appears to be increasing, which reduces social interaction. This is not necessarily a cause for concern – many seafarers prefer to retire to their cabins after having been on duty. However, measures to encourage interaction should be considered. These could include:

- Provision of communal recreational facilities
- Organisation of activities that promote interaction amongst crew members
- Facilitation of pastoral visits to ships from providers of port welfare services

Practical Example.

A company pays a monthly sum into a crew welfare fund to enable their seafarers to purchase items for recreation. Karaoke machines are popular, along with basketballs, football kits and interactive computer games.

ITF SEAFARERS' TRUST 'STILL AT SEA' PROJECT © NEIL PATRICK M SISON.

8 ALCOHOL

Seafarers on many ships are prohibited from consuming alcoholic beverages whilst on board and it is for consideration whether banning alcohol completely on deep sea ships makes a positive contribution to safety. It is worth considering whether a company may have a safer operation if it allows seafarers to consume alcoholic drinks on board under controlled conditions i.e. the amount and the times at which it may be consumed are restricted (in order to ensure that crew members do not have alcohol in their systems when reporting for duty) than by banning alcohol outright. The latter may encourage seafarers to drink to excess when taking shore leave. On short sea voyages bans on alcohol consumption are fully justified.

Practical Example.

A company that operates a dry ship culture relaxed its ban on seafarers consuming alcoholic drinks whilst on shore leave when their vessel was in port, considering that permitting limited quantities of alcoholic drinks whilst off the ship would benefit the wellbeing of their crews by increased bonding outside of the workplace. This was specifically for those who were not due to perform duties within a reasonable time frame so as not to be detrimental to the safety of the ship.

9 INTERNET

Future generations of seafarers will not be familiar with a world without the internet and any companies that fail to make provision on board will struggle with their recruitment. However not all companies are in a position to provide high bandwidths at all times.

Practical Example.

A company provided free internet allowance for seafarers and additional bandwidth upgrades.

10   FOOD AND CATERING

A nutritious diet can influence mental as well as physical health. Some companies have introduced programmes to improve the diet of their crews and these have produced impressive results and been very well received by seafarers. (See **Annex B** for more information on mental wellbeing and diet).

It is possible to use onboard meal planning and provisioning to reflect the cultural and religious backgrounds of crew members, to promote inclusion and individual wellbeing. This is included in the Ships' Cook Certificate training[2] but catering staff should be encouraged to actively incorporate it into their working practice.

Practical Examples.

1. A chef encouraged crew members to inform them of a favourite home cooked meal and ascertained a suitable day where each crew member's favourite was provided. It was dependent on crew size and length of voyage. This scheme invigorated dialogue amongst the crew who would explain the significance of the dish which fortified team bonding. On long voyages it gave crew members food reminiscent of home to look forward to.

2. A crew member's birthday was recognised while on voyage. Celebratory food related to the nationality of the crew member is a positive token of recognition and reinforces morale as well as social interaction.

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2   MLC Regulation 3.2, MSN 1846 (M)

11 SHIPBOARD CULTURE

If seafarers don't feel that they can discuss matters with their colleagues or report safety concerns, it can negatively affect their mental wellbeing. The UK's social partners have been at the forefront of efforts to rid the industry of harassment and bullying and their work has been taken up at EU and global level.

Practical Examples.

1. A company that employs crew members of differing nationalities sought to engage with their non-British nationals by providing information about company activities to promote good mental health and remedial services in the native languages of the crew members concerned.

2. A company introduced a management training programme at all levels within its organisation, focusing upon empathy, just & fair culture and improving staff engagement and ownership of tasks and moving away from micro-management.
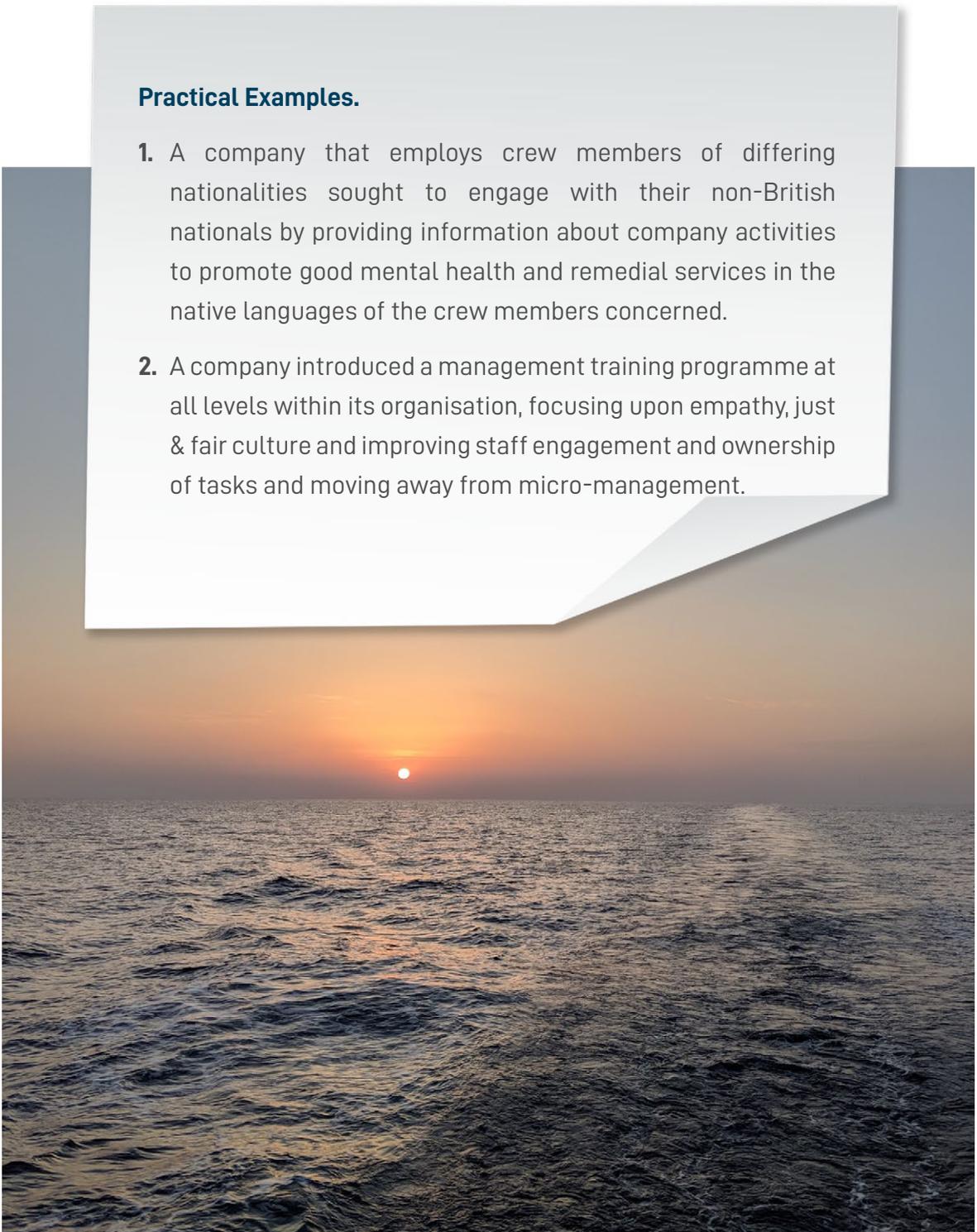
12 COMMITMENT FROM TOP MANAGEMENT

As with a company policy on any subject, a strong and demonstrable commitment from top management is essential if the policy is to be effective and win the confidence of seafarers. Top management should therefore take measures to show that seafarers are encouraged to discuss their mental health and will not suffer any detriment, or be poorly thought of, if they do so.

Just as an authoritarian, hectoring management style may be perceived as a form of bullying, it can have a serious negative impact on the mental health of those workers who report to such a manager. By contrast managers who show empathy and trust in their staff and support for company mental health policies are likely to have more successful teams with much reduced incidence of mental health problems. Managers should be provided with training in appropriate styles that are conducive to improving work performance and mental health and wellbeing. Such styles should engage the team regularly and encourage team members to raise concerns about living and working conditions, workplace health and safety and any mental health issues that are of concern to them.

Practical Examples.

1. In one company, senior managers made short films of no more than five minutes' duration in which they spoke candidly about their own mental health concerns. These were shown to all staff. It delivered a strong message that, as far as the company was concerned, there was no stigma attached to mental health concerns and mental illnesses.

2. A company ensured that mental health formed a part of all seafarer conferences to show continued reinforcement of its importance.
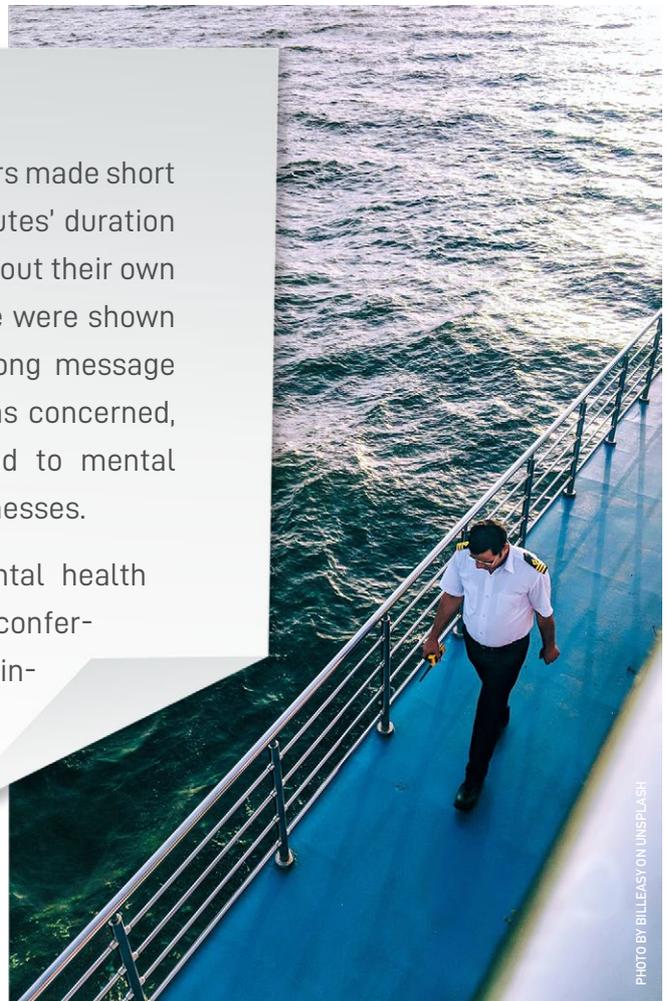
PHOTO BY BILLEASY ON UNSPLASH

13 SUPPORT FROM COLLEAGUES

Trained mental health first aiders amongst a ship's crew can make a significant positive impact, provided that it is part of an holistic company policy on mental wellbeing. Their role can be preventive as well as remedial, provided they are adept in spotting the warning signs that are likely to indicate the presence of a mental health problem.

It is important for the company to ensure that mental health first aiders are themselves provided with support, particularly if they are affected by anything raised and if they need support signposting the individual to the suitable outlets for help should it be necessary. They should never be made to feel that it is their personal mission to resolve a mental health problem in a colleague. First aid means just that – in the same way as a person trained in providing medical first aid is not qualified to undertake medical diagnosis or provide advanced treatment to a patient.

Practical Examples.

1. A company funded mental health first aid training of several staff members and established a network for them to share experiences, in order that they are not working in isolation.

2. A company encouraged their staff to anonymously nominate colleagues they would feel most comfortable talking to regarding their mental health. This helped develop a stigma free environment and trained staff members who would naturally be approachable.

3. A vessel adopted techniques that stem from positive psychology such as random acts of kindness. Members were encouraged to perform small acts of care giving without the expectation of return such as making a hot beverage for a colleague.

14 BUILDING RESILIENCE

Resilience refers to an individual's capacity to adapt in the face of challenging circumstances and stressful events whilst maintaining stable mental wellbeing, rather than just one's ability to "bounce back". Resilience is not a personality trait – it can be learned and training courses are available. The training encourages participants to focus on positive aspects of their lives, to think positively, to avoid worrying excessively about matters that they cannot control, to set goals and rise to challenges and to identify ways of reducing stress that work for them. People can build resilience through assertiveness training, learning relaxation techniques and rewarding themselves for their achievements.

Companies can assist by providing or facilitating training in assertiveness and conflict resolution and by adopting a just and fair culture – ensuring that individuals do not feel blame for things that have gone wrong but are not their fault.

The Seven C's of Resilience

7 Cs OF RESILIENCE

- **Control**
- **Competence**
- **Coping**
- **Confidence**
- **Connection**
- **Character**
- **Contribution**

The lifestyle habits foundational to resilience are regular exercise and good quality sleep which reinforces the importance of ensuring that adequate rest and the opportunity for regular exercise are facilitated onboard.

Practical Examples.

1. One company introduced resilience training activities on board ship which included active participation and assisted crew in taking note of their personal wellbeing on board. This included discussions on how they could support each other and what activities they would enjoy collectively. It was important to plan the activities and write them down as a commitment to each other.

2. One company implemented gratitude exercises. This encouraged crew members to vocalise positive elements of their day to other members of crew and reinforced that they would be listened to, whatever their rank.

15 FACTORS OUTSIDE THE COMPANY'S CONTROL

Many factors that contribute to suboptimal levels of mental wellbeing have causes that are external to the company. They could be related to family, relationships, illnesses, addictions, bereavements and other stress-inducing life events, including historical traumas. There are however, measures that companies can take to alleviate or mitigate the detrimental effects.

Companies should facilitate access to confidential third-party helplines, to enable seafarers to discuss any concerns they might have with trained and sympathetic counsellors. However such provision should complement, rather than replace, the company's commitments as described in these guidelines.

Companies should permit employees who have been bereaved, or are experiencing a domestic event that is causing serious concern, time at home and, if they are on board, early repatriation.

Tools that can assist seafarers in recognising signs of suboptimal mental wellbeing in themselves and their colleagues include:

- Self-help guides
- Mental Health First Aid / Awareness training with a marine focus
- Self-care programmes covering (but not limited to) education, nutrition, physical exercise, relaxation, sleeping
- Journaling (See **Annex C**)

Companies should keep in mind that employees who become trained as mental health first-aiders or ambassadors may themselves require assistance and/or counselling if this role brings them into contact with distressing situations. They should never be made to feel that it is their personal mission to resolve somebody else's mental health issues.

Practical Example.

A company conducted a survey to ascertain the biggest form of stress on board. The results showed that work related stress accounted for approximately 25%, while on board conflict, challenges at home, loneliness and distance from family were also significant. Some of these other stress factors could be helped by company involvement for example the Employee Assistance Program they had in place could be utilised by family members.

16 MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

Depression is a common mental illness and one that most companies should prepare for within their work force. A person is diagnosed as clinically depressed if they present at least two symptoms of depression for two weeks. Therefore, it is possible for depression to develop and be undiagnosed throughout a voyage. It is possible to recover, though some individuals may go through phases. A mentally healthy workplace can reduce the risk of depressive episodes.

Suicide is considered the most serious crisis associated with mental ill health therefore it should be a priority for mental health policy within a company. All suicides are considered as preventable. Mental health first aid / awareness courses educate with a structured strategy regarding this topic.

Although it is important to acknowledge that suicide is a potential risk factor in an individual experiencing chronic depression or certain other conditions, it should be borne in mind that this is a rare outcome and that treating any seafarer who comes forward suffering form poor mental health as a potential suicide risk will not be conducive to reducing stigma or encouraging openness.

Voyage extension is proven to impact psychological wellbeing. Companies should recognise this and put measures into place to support seafarers if extension is unavoidable.

Language surrounding commonly used mental health related phrases should be considered to reduce stigma within the company. The use of "commit" suicide implies it is a criminal act, and thus discourages people from vocalising suicidal thoughts.

It is beneficial for a company to understand what support is available for their crews. This support can range from helplines, journaling aids, apps or training signposts. It is important that this support is compiled into a tool kit of resources which are visible and easily accessible on board for crew without constant internet access. (See **Annex D**).

LIZ MARAMI – AGAINST THE TIDE FOUNDATION

Practical Examples.

1. A company implemented workshops with seafarers and shoreside marine HR to bridge the gap and address topic areas.

2. A company carried out a risk assessment covering leading mental health issues applicable to seafarers such as fatigue, sleep disorders, anxiety, stress, depression and addiction.

3. A company displayed posters on board to signpost seafarers to suitable support outlets. (See **Annex D**).

Company name:

Assessment carried out by:

Date of next review:

Date assessment was carried out:

Risk	People potentially at risk? (Risk level 1-5)	Measures currently in place to eliminate or mitigate the risk	Required action to eliminate, or mitigate risk	Person(s) responsible	Time frame for action	Completed
Social Isolation	• All crew (3)	• Crew Mess • Shared Meal times	• Identify a social events facilitator • Regular events organised	• Master • Social Facilitator		
	• Lone workers (4) • Lone members of language/cultural/gender or other groups (5)		• Identification of crew members at higher risk levels • Monitoring of isolation and wellbeing through identified senior • Peer Support mechanisms enacted	• Crewing/Ships manager in collaboration with Senior officers • Senior Officer • HR/Peer Supporters		

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3 Mentally Healthy Ships – ISWAN
   "Mentally Healthy Ships" provides an extensive list of Risks to Mental Health for Seafarers as well as in depth recommendations for the implementation of policy and practice to promote mental health on board.
   Template produced by ISWAN

Apps (all available for free)

Wellness at Sea
Sailors' Society

Shoreleave – Finding a Seafarer Centre
ITF

Maritime Wellbeing Programme
Maritime Wellbeing

Catch it – Making sense of moods
Universities of Liverpool and Manchester

WorryTree – Journalling
WorryTree – NHS approved

Relax Melodies – Fatigue and Sleep Hygiene
Relax Melodies – contains in-app purchases

Food and Catering

Nutrition and Mental Health – How to balance a diet for a mental health condition
Food for the Brain Foundation

How to manage mood with food (Video)
Mind

Training

Seas the Mind Mental Health First Aid – Superyacht and hospitality at sea

ISWAN - Mental Health Awareness Training
Variety of levels from crew awareness to management level personnel

Resilience, Wellbeing and Awareness

Maritime Wellbeing Programme
Maritime Wellbeing

Steps to Positive Mental Health
International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network

Wellbeing at Sea: A Pocket Guide for Seafarers
Maritime Coastguard Agency

Care for People – Resilience Program
Shell

Leadership Skills for Crew Wellbeing (Video Modules)
Maritime Wellbeing

Understanding Depression – The Black Dog
World Health Organisation - 2003

Further Reading

Seafarer Mental Health Study
ITF Seafarers' Trust & Yale University - 2019

Seafarers' Mental Health and Wellbeing
IOSH and Cardiff University 2019

Maritime UK – Mental Health Network
Collaborative Mental Health platform

Wellbeing Lessons from Survey on Seafarer Wellbeing and COVID-19 Pandemic
Lloyd's Register – 2020

Merchant Navy Training Board & Maritime Charities Group
A Standard for Seafarers' Mental Health Awareness and Wellbeing Training

CHECK IN WITH YOURSELF

Where's my mental health today?
How do I feel? Mentally? Physically?

-
-
-

Looking after myself
Drinking enough water? Eating a balanced diet? Sleeping well? Anything I can improve?

-
-
-

How's my thinking?
Am I having unhelpful thoughts? Can I turn those thoughts around?

-
-
-

My stress container
How full is my container? Am I using helpful coping strategies? Are they working?

-
-
-

3 things I'm grateful for this week:
1
2
3

3 things I want to achieve this week:
1
2
3

@kellyscause   kellyscause.com

Personal Wellbeing Weekly Check-in sheet.

For original download please contact **hello@kellyscause.com**

ISWAN Mental Health Training

Variety of levels from crew awareness to Management Level Personnel

ISWAN poster downloadable for free here