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# MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

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As part of Bupa's Wellness program, I was very fortunate to be able to participate in the 'Mental Health First Aid' (MHFA) course, run in Auckland in July 2019. Bupa Dental was well represented with several Practice Managers and a Practice Principal attending, covering the management of ten practices throughout New Zealand. The training also included members from Bupa Aged Care &



People team which was great, because it meant we had people we didn't know well, always a bit more challenging and realistic with the role play.

The content was at times confronting and triggered some of us, with the odd tear being shared, myself included. Run over two days, I personally learned that nearly everything I had done or thought in the past about Mental Health, though well intentioned, was wrong!

**We all have Mental Health, like physical health we have good days and not so good days**

The fact that 1:5 New Zealand adults will have a common mental illness in anyone year, that is 1/4 (quarter) of our workforce, astounds me!!

Many people carry their burden like an extra weight, slowing them down throughout the day, travelling in a grey zone of situational ebbs and flows without being really unwell, but not doing great either. How do you know when you or someone you might be concerned about has moved out of the 'grey zone' and moved to a level that effects day to day function?

**When behaviour is affecting any of the '4 L's' - Liver, Love, Livelihood or Law**

When our Mental Health starts to affect any of the 4 L's others may start to recognise that the level of burden and unwellness has created some behaviour changes, this is where the MHFA

training is critical. Not only do you learn to recognise the early warning signs but having the knowledge to feel comfortable enough to approach someone. By following the A-L-G-E-E steps covered in the training you help encourage those that might need it to seek some professional advice or assistance, get intervention if it is at crisis level.

As a first-aider we don't diagnose or treat mental health, we listen, support and encourage, whether that's just to let someone know we are worried about them through to supporting them get professional help, this course gives you the skills to do it respectfully and confidently.

The dental profession is known for its high stress levels, work-life balances can be challenging no matter what environment and sometimes it impacts us whether fleetingly or for longer periods. Remembering we never know how heavy other people's burdens are unless they feel safe to share or the impact becomes detrimental.

## **I would recommend Mental Health First Aid not just for Managers but all people - this is a human issue.**

Knowing what to ask like "Have you spoken to anyone about this?" or "Have you had suicidal thoughts" came as a shock because of what you hear in the media and what you think you know. Knowing how to ask those difficult questions is one of the many skills you practice in this training, though it may seem impossible it needn't be. Remembering if you can approach someone early on, just being able to listen to them, or direct them to an employee assistance program or even a wellness program like mindfulness or 10,000 steps maybe all that is needed to improve a work mates mental health.

In Maori we have a proverb - we say the most important thing in the world is "**He Tangata, He Tangata, He Tangata**" the people, the people, the people.



Thank you  for making this training available and in your words ....

**Helping  
people live**

*longer, healthier,  
happier lives*