

YOUR HSA GROUP GUIDE TO  
HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

# pulse

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Experts urge caution on  
trauma counselling

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Executive health assessments  
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**HSA**  
GROUP

TEN YEARS OF PULSE

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# Experts urge caution on trauma counselling

Trauma counselling following a serious incident, like the death of a workmate or a life threatening accident, far from helping may in fact make the situation worse, according to a leading Australian expert.

Professor John Pead, from the Australian Centre for Post Traumatic Mental Health (ACPMH), is urging employers to be cautious about utilising trauma counselling.

'There is no evidence to support the effectiveness of trauma counselling and it may in fact increase the risk of worse outcomes,' Professor Pead notes.

'This can occur where well intentioned counsellors inadvertently facilitate individuals in adopting the sick role, foster work avoidance and thereby contribute to longer term disability.'

This position is strongly backed by Work Solutions.

'Recent evidence suggests that the traditional approach of structured group debriefing following a serious incident isn't necessarily helpful and may even be harmful,' Dr Melissa Lehmann, National Operations Manager for Psychology, Work Solutions, explained.

'This is because individuals vary in their response to stressful incidents – some may want to explore their emotions while others prefer not to. Both responses are normal,' she said.

'The best primary response to a serious incident is to have the support of family, friends and colleagues. Eighty percent of

people will recover on their own with this support and without the need for psychological treatment.'

That's not to say that professional support and counselling no longer has a role.

'It usually takes around three to four weeks for people to start to feel "normal" again following a serious or life threatening incident. If they're not experiencing a reduction in symptoms or distress within this time, that's when therapy should be considered,' Dr Lehmann said.

'In such a situation, the treatment recommended by the ACPMH is trauma focused cognitive behaviour therapy, which is best provided by clinical or senior psychologists.'

In response to the latest trauma research and in line with ACPMH guidelines, Work Solutions has developed the Employee Psychological Program (EPP) especially for Australian workplaces.

'Unlike Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), which typically address everyday issues like relationship difficulties, minor grief, and communication issues, EPPs address clinical issues like depression, alcohol abuse, acute grief and trauma,' Dr Lehmann said.

'While many people will bounce back after a crisis and successfully "get on with life", the EPP is now available for those who need professional support to get their life back on track.'

## EPP

Addresses clinical issues:

- depression
- anxiety
- alcohol abuse
- trauma
- acute grief

Delivered by clinical or senior psychologists

Recommendations provided to the organisation to assist the employee

Usually 6 sessions

## EAP

Addresses everyday issues:

- relationship difficulties
- minor grief
- problem solving
- communication issues

Delivered by generalist psychologist or counsellor

Service is confidential

Usually 3-4 sessions

**For further information about Work Solutions EPP and other services please contact Melissa Lehmann (03) 9224 8800, [melissa.lehmann@worksolutions.com.au](mailto:melissa.lehmann@worksolutions.com.au)**

# Case study: executive health assessments — why bother?

As anybody who's ever been involved in the time consuming and often expensive (head hunting fees can amount to tens of thousands of dollars) process of recruiting senior executives knows, it's in every organisation's interest to have to do this as little as possible.

This is even more so given today's extremely tight labour market characterised by skills shortages and record low unemployment.

One risk management tool to help organisations limit turnover of senior staff is the executive health assessment. Not only can an assessment help identify any health risk factors that might impinge on current or future performance it can also have a positive effect on employee morale by helping them feel valued.

This is a message more and more employers are embracing as they seek ways to differentiate themselves from the competition.

## Background

A major national Australian organisation with a workforce of more than 20 000 recently contracted Health For Industry to conduct executive health assessments on over 100 of their most senior executives.

The organisation viewed their senior managers as a 'vital resource', and were concerned that many were so busy working for the benefit of the organisation that they may not be taking enough care of their own health through regular health check ups.

## What

They wanted to offer their executives an opportunity to have their health status assessed to identify and address risk factors or warning signs to help avoid significant or potentially fatal health crises.

Each executive underwent a complete physical and medical examination to assess their cardiac and other health risk factors. This included measuring blood pressure, body mass index and waist circumference, skin checks, screening for high cholesterol and diabetes, liver function test, musculo-skeletal assessment and the taking of a detailed personal and medical history.

## Outcomes

The individual results were presented to each executive as part of a confidential de-brief consultation which also included advice about how to address any identified risks, including nutritional and exercise tips. Where necessary they were referred for further assessment to their GP or a specialist.

De-identified data was provided back to the organisation to give them a snap-shot of the general health of their senior staff and to help them plan and implement wellness programs to further optimise the health, well being and performance of staff.

## HEALTH FOR INDUSTRY EXECUTIVE HEALTH ASSESSMENTS

### Executive benefits

- decrease risk of serious health crisis
- supported to make lifestyle changes
- enhanced work performance due to optimal well being
- increased morale, feeling valued

### Organisational benefits

- retention of key executive staff
- maintenance of intellectual capital
- enhanced productivity due to optimal well being
- competitive edge

For further information about our executive wellness programs please contact  
Dene Cicci t: 03 9224 8818, e: [dene.cicci@hfi.com.au](mailto:dene.cicci@hfi.com.au)

## Meeting your legal obligation to travelling staff

By Jeremy Limpens,  
National Client Manager,  
Travel Doctor–TMVC

Thousands of Australians travel overseas on business every year. Most overseas trips are trouble-free, great experiences and the Travel Doctor – TMVC would like to keep it that way.

But things can and do go wrong, as evidenced by the following real life case.

An employee suffered serious ongoing health problems after contracting an illness (shigella dysentery) on a business trip to Ghana, Western Africa. Following her illness and absence from work, she successfully sued on the grounds that her employer failed to warn her of the health risks related to overseas travel and was negligent in not ensuring that she had the proper vaccinations or providing her with dietary and other preventative health advice.

The case was settled out of court for a six-figure sum.

This is just one example of myriad health and safety related challenges Australian businesses face when undertaking international business travel.

Employers assume a substantial level of responsibility for keeping employees safe while they are at work, whether in Australia or abroad – if an employee is involved in an incident while overseas on business-related travel, the employer will not only be threatened by the loss of a valued member of its team, but also with legal liability.

Employers are both morally and legally bound to ensure that they do not cause death, illness or injury to those they employ. The moral obligation is self-explanatory. The legal duties have two sources—statute and common law.

In regards to Australian state OHS legislation, companies can, so far as is reasonably practicable, address their legal responsibility to provide and maintain a working environment that is safe and without risks to health by implementing sound travel health management procedures.

Safe business travel is not a matter of good luck, but rather one of an organisation's commitment to safe travel practice, good planning, risk management, and pre departure preparation.

***'Companies can ... address their legal responsibility ... by implementing sound travel health management procedures.'***



For advice and information on best practice health and safety policies and procedures for international business travel and overseas operations please contact your nearest Travel Doctor-TMVC clinic or visit [www.traveldoctor.com.au](http://www.traveldoctor.com.au)

# 'Picking up the peaces' -Kokoda Trek for PTSD

'Picking Up The Peaces', an ACT volunteer group working under the auspices of the Vietnam Veterans Federation is raising awareness for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) by undertaking the difficult trek along the Kokoda Trail from 12-21 July. The aim is to raise awareness in the community, particularly among the families and colleagues of those who may be at risk of PTSD, and lower the stigma associated with PTSD.

The volunteers taking part come from many of the groups that are traditionally in the front line when dealing with trauma – the AFP, various emergency services, the defence forces – and most of them have a link to or experience of the devastating effects of the disorder. It is hoped the Trek will become an annual part of Mental Health Week and a national awareness day on October 11 each year.



Some of the members of the team who will be tackling the Kokoda Trail in July to raise awareness of PTSD

The HSA Group is very pleased that through our travel health arm, The Travel Doctor-TMVC, we are able to support this important project by providing medicals, vaccinations and travel kits to the value of \$2000.

## WINTER WELLNESS TIPS

- > **Eat well:** As always, keep a healthy diet with lots of fresh fruits and vegetables. Vegetable soup is great for cold winter days-it is an excellent source of vitamins and rich in antioxidants.
- > **Exercise:** It can be harder to be motivated to exercise in the cold winter months, however exercise is important all year round. Try activities such as gym classes and indoor swimming. If exercising outdoors be sure to take extra time to warm your muscles.
- > **Keeping warm:** If you are heading to the snow this season, be sure to dress appropriately so as to avoid frostbite and hypothermia.
- > **Herbal tea:** Instead of indulging in warm hot chocolate drinks on cold mornings, try herbal tea as an alternative to warm your insides.
- > **Skin care:** Cold air and indoor heaters can dry out your skin. Keep hydrated and use moisturizers to help prevent dry, cracked and itchy skin.

## Word bank

**Clinical Psychologist:** A mental health specialist who assesses and treats mental illness, emotional disturbance and behavioural problems.

**Cognitive Behavior Therapy:** A form of psychological intervention that assists in the alteration of a person's unhelpful thinking patterns, detrimental feelings and behaviours.

CBT is particularly effective with mood disorders.

**Post Traumatic Stress:** An anxiety disorder that may develop following exposure to an extremely disturbing ordeal in which grave physical harm was threatened or occurred. It is characterised by ongoing re-experiencing of the traumatic event, avoidance or emotional numbing

towards activities or experiences related to the event, difficulty sleeping, concentrating or irritability.

**Body Mass Index:** An approximate measure that determines whether a person is over or under weight. It is calculated by dividing their weight in kilograms by the square of their height in meters.

**Shigella Dysentery:** also known as bacillary dysentery. It is caused by bacteria of the genus Shigella and transmitted by eating or drinking contaminated substances. Symptoms include abdominal pain, stomach cramps, fever, dehydration and frequent bowel movements.

# Profile

**LIZ FORSYTH** Regional Manager : Work Solutions : SA



Liz Forsyth

Liz Forsyth has more than 30 years experience in occupational therapy (OT) and rehabilitation working in both the public and private sectors. Her extensive career has included providing OT services to injured workers, consulting services to Indigenous communities and serving as Chief Executive Officer of community care organisations in both the NT and SA.

Her driving passion when working is to do the best job possible in satisfying customers and supporting staff. Since joining Work Solutions in February 2008 she has made it her mission to build on the success of Work Solutions in South Australia with creativity and attention to the details that matter.

Liz has qualifications in occupational therapy and rehabilitation, a Master of Business Administration and was also a state finalist for the Telstra Business Woman of the Year Award in SA. When not working she takes time out to keep up with family, husband and manic kelpie called Cooper, and most enjoys anything hands on, outside or that tastes good. Travel and creating with clay are particular favourites.

**DAMIEN JOHNSTON** General Manager : Health For Industry : WA



Damien Johnston

With more than 15 years in the health industry, Damien has extensive experience in the development and delivery of health management solutions in both the public and private sector. Prior to joining Health For Industry, Damien held a number of senior management positions overseeing the provision of health and safety services both internally and externally, including serving as General Manager of a national health services provider.

He has successfully overseen the delivery of services to a diverse range of industry sectors including mining, construction, manufacturing, transport, IT, professional services, government, banking and finance. Damien understands the challenges that companies face when embarking on new health initiatives and, along with his team, strives to deliver high quality and innovative solutions.

With a background in exercise physiology, Damien has also completed postgraduate qualifications in biomedical science, exercise science and business management. He has specific research expertise in the area of 'fitness for the workplace' and has lectured in exercise and health science within a number of universities. Away from the workplace, Damien tries to stay fit by exercising regularly and hopes to find enough time to once again become competitive at triathlons.



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