



## Breathing Space: Wellbeing in the Workplace

Wellbeing in the workplace is an important subject that's been steadily growing in awareness over the past few years. With 12.5 million working days lost due to work-related stress, depression or anxiety in 2016/17, according to HSE (Health and Safety Executive), it's clear that it's an issue that needs addressing nationwide. In high pressure times and in high pressure environments, it really is important to find a little respite in the day to help maintain personal wellbeing. Whether it's a lunch break without a pile of work demanding to be done or just a quiet place to breathe for a few minutes- a bit of time in an uplifting environment can make such a difference.

In light of this, I've spoken to some staff members here at Salisbury District Hospital, to see how they maintain their wellbeing and discover where they go to breathe, get some headspace and lower their stress levels during their day at work.

Kate Merrifield, Salisbury District Hospital's project manager, finds that anywhere she can go to escape the hospital environment is greatly beneficial to her wellbeing at work. With a lot of her day spent glued to a computer, she finds the Hospice Garden a particularly calming place to go for her lunch break. The Hospice Garden is located at the South end of the hospital site, overlooking the valley towards Odstock village. It is used for patients, visitors and staff to get some quality time outside.

Kate loves the way "it feels like a private garden", removed from the clinical setting and profoundly peaceful. She finds the sense of escapism is enhanced by the way in which the garden encourages wildlife with the central pond and an assortment of flowers.



Spending time with nature has been proven to have a highly positive effect on people's wellbeing. In a Dutch study on anxiety, it came to light that the more access people have to green, natural environments, the better their mental and physical health was. It's important that we can find time in our days to be able to enjoy nature and the Hospice Garden is a great place to be able to do this while onsite.

Tracey Merrifield, Emergency Planning Resilience and Response Manager, also chose the Hospice Garden as her favourite place to visit during her working day if she needs a few minutes to gather her thoughts and get away from the bustle of work life. She similarly enjoys the calming aspect of the

garden and appreciates how “well-maintained” the area is. Tracey finds it challenging to schedule breaks due to the unpredictability of her tasks but feels that, if she were to do this, her productivity would be boosted.



Kate and Tracey also find the hospital chapel “a positive and completely safe environment” to visit when needing a few quiet minutes to themselves. The chapel is on level 3 of the main hospital.

Tracey also commented on how she believes it would be beneficial to staff’s wellbeing and attitude to work if there were a greater number of designated staff areas, to promote more of a social atmosphere and boost morale. Tracey said that she “often finds herself having lunch at her desk”, unable to get away from her to-do list and lacking social interaction, which is an important aspect of maintaining good wellbeing. As inherently social creatures, it is hugely beneficial for us to connect and have opportunities to connect with others. Friendships have the wonderful ability to improve mental health by elevating feelings of purpose, self-worth and confidence, all of which are also valuable when working. A lot can be said for a ‘tea and cake break’ with a colleague!

Ian Robinson, Head of Facilities at Salisbury District Hospital, also remarked on the social aspect of work, saying that he prefers socialising in his breaks as he is regularly cooped up, alone in his office. Ian mentioned that “walking meetings are a good way of being able to leave the office to get fresh air and exercise, while still being able to get work done”. According to NHS.uk, a bit of exercise every day can “boost self-esteem, mood, sleep quality and energy as well as reducing your risk of stress, depression, dementia and Alzheimer’s disease”, so being able to have meetings while roaming the site is a good way to maintain personal wellbeing without having to stop your flow of work.

Ian was honest about the unlikelihood of him being able to schedule a break and explained that it’s much more about “grabbing time” than adding something else to the list of things to organise. He acknowledged that, ideally, he’d like to schedule in breaks and would encourage others to do so, in the belief that it would increase productivity. If he had the opportunity to take a break, Ian would go to the seating area in Facilities HQ just to get a change of scene, away from the office.



Paul Freeman, General Manager of Facilities, similarly expressed the little time he is able to dedicate to pre-scheduled breaks, saying how, even if he gets an opportunity to have respite from work, he

wouldn't have "the luxury of stopping to sit down" and mentioned how "it's difficult for people to give themselves permission to stop". His breaks are often on-the-go while walking to another part of the hospital site to attend a meeting. He finds the time spent purposefully walking around site salutary as he gets 'out and about' while still achieving what has to be done. Paul favours areas of quiet and, when he does have the opportunity and needs to get some headspace, he enjoys going to a small courtyard in the middle of the site which he described as somewhere to get "grass beneath your feet".

If he can't escape his office for some fresh air, he finds that simply switching tasks can have a similar effect psychologically, making him feel like he's had a change of scene. He enjoys the variety in his work and explained how beneficial that is for him and his wellbeing; showing admiration for those who lack variety in their work. Paul explained the benefits of knowing yourself and knowing what you need to do to maintain your own wellbeing.

Rebecca Seymour, Elevate Coordinator, similarly has little time to take a break during her working day; remarking on the fact that there's "always a job needing to be done" and the difficulty of finding a moment to step away from the demands. She finds that giving herself a bit of time to have lunch with colleagues is a good way to maintain her wellbeing on a non-stop working day. When she's not run off her feet, Rebecca enjoys going to Horatio's Garden, an award-winning space funded entirely by 'Horatio's Garden Charity' which "creates and lovingly cares for beautiful accessible gardens in NHS spinal injury centres". It was made specifically for spinal unit patients, in memory of Horatio Chapple.



Rebecca is also fond of walking to the nearby fields after work as she thrives from spending time with nature. She loves the fact that the hospital is surrounded by expansive countryside and is passionate about being able to breathe fresh air. Due to the higher levels of oxygen outside, particularly in green spaces, escaping the office to enjoy some fresh air can result in greater brain functioning, improved concentration and an increase in energy. The garden areas onsite and the nearby fields are ideal for taking a few moments out to gather thoughts while reaping the benefits from fresh air- caffeine isn't the only answer!

We are fortunate to have some beautiful locations here at Salisbury District Hospital, as well as being surrounded by the Wiltshire countryside. A few minutes of breathing fresh air and surrounding yourself with nature can be all someone needs during a hectic day at work. But it doesn't always need to be a hectic day to give yourself some time out- breaks don't have to be a reaction to feeling stressed, they can be a proactive step to prevent stress and improve overall wellbeing. It's important to be able to have somewhere to go that's not just the opposite corner of your desk! Although, it can be all too easy to bypass yourself for the sake of ticking something off an ever-growing to-do list; it's essential that your own health is *also* on that to-do list. Your wellbeing matters.

Milly Forbes

