



People Risk takes on new importance

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Ensuring you are doing the right thing: Health and safety – a different world as we exit COVID-19.

It is over 100 years since the world has experienced a global pandemic close to COVID-19. Over the coming weeks and months, we will see businesses return to “normality”. Inevitably the definition of normal will change and with change will come a new set of risks were not previously contemplated. Undoubtedly, we will rise to these challenges as we have done in the past, however we are duty bound to manage health and safety in compliance with the prevailing legislation.

As a reminder, the guiding principle of the Health and Safety Act 2015 (HSWA) is that workers and others need to be given the highest level of protection from workplace health and safety risks, as is reasonable. There is a requirement to proactively identify and manage risk. Businesses have the primary responsibility for health and safety of their workers. Company directors and others must carry out due diligence to make sure the business understands this, and that is meeting its health and safety responsibilities including the potential for work related health conditions- physical and psychological acute or long-term illnesses.

Long before COVID-19 the community was experiencing an upward trend in mental health issues. However mental illness is something quite different. We are often reluctant to engage, reluctant to admit that we may have an issue and, for many we do not have the skills to deal with the issue.

An article by Dr Muriel Newman mentions a recent report released by Auckland University’s Centre for Informed Futures. Family violence, depression, anxiety and other issues can be expected to rise as people face loss of income, unemployment and simply being in proximity with others. The authors of the report predict the country’s already high rates of depression and anxiety among young people will increase, along with suicide rate, and they believe that up to 10% of people affected by income loss, unemployment or ill health during the outbreak are likely to experience post-traumatic stress disorder.

The aftermath of COVID-19 will present situations we have not experienced or had to deal with previously. To give some context to this point let us think about all the essential workers and how they might present after COVID-19. In a normal setting our doctors and nurses treat the ill and injured. These same people are compassionate and deal with some stressful situations. They are often supported by family and friends of the patient. Presently they are working long hours under stress, they are having to deal with patients who are seriously ill or may have died without the support of the family or the community. Notwithstanding taking precautions they are exposed to a very virulent disease. Adrenalin levels are high which is enabling them to deliver at a high capacity.

The question is what happens when we exit this high intense situation. The same question can be posed of all essential workers- police, emergency services, supermarket staff, pharmacies, food producers etc.

We have seen soldiers returning from war struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder. The likelihood of our essential worker experiencing something similar is not farfetched. General workers will also return from lockdown under different circumstances. Some will be exposed to financial pressure, some will be suffering from emotional circumstances, some will be suffering from extended isolation, some will be suffering from violence and mental harm, bringing it all back into the workplace. Some will continue to work from home with associated challenges. A spike in psychological/mental issues will inevitably happen.

The question for directors, owners, managers, and employees is how to manage the new risk environment. You can take a reactive approach with all the corresponding risks or you can take a proactive approach and engage the right support at the right time for your people.

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About Wellnz

Wellnz a specialised case management provider in the ACC and allied health space has created a suite of services designed to assist business. The Wellnz package includes a case management approach, whereby they gain an understanding of what the business requires. Wellnz offering includes a preferred provider network of vocational support services along with psychological support.

The goal is to provide a variety of wellbeing solutions that match the diverse needs of businesses and their people. The package of specialised services includes (but not limited to):

- Vocational support
- Psychological support
- Linking people in with budgeting services
- Linking people in with community support
- Referring people to utilise resources already available through the workplace
- Flu vaccinations
- Pre-employment checks
- Drug and alcohol testing
- Occupational nurses

For assistance to guide you through the new environment contact specialisedservices@wellnz.co.nz

