

# PTH NEWSLETTER

Issue 20 July - September 2011

Performance Through Health



## Healthy lives, healthy people

"The Department of Health will work in partnership with employers through the Public Health Responsibility Deal, to improve health at work" was a statement recently published in the Government's White Paper 'Healthy Lives, Healthy People'.

Discussing how health and wellbeing can be improved within people's lives, the document states: "They [employers] can achieve this through establishing a strong cultural lead, strengthening management training in recognising and responding to the health needs of the workforce, and working more closely with others, particularly occupational health and primary care."

Central government plan to provide the evidence and data needed to raise awareness among employers of the clear case for investing in the health of their workforce. This includes further development of the Change4Life employee wellness programme.

Another important tool is the 'Workplace Wellbeing Tool', this can help demonstrate the business case that investing in the health and wellbeing of your workforce will increase productivity as well as staff engagement.<sup>1</sup>

A copy of the paper is available at: [www.official-documents.gov.uk/](http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/)

PTH is pleased with the results of the paper as our philosophy has always been that a good occupational health service:

- Helps you maintain a happy and healthy workforce
- Prevent ill health and accidents at work
- Minimise sickness absence
- Better manage your staff
- Better manage your business

<sup>1</sup> Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Our strategy for public health in England

## Know your numbers!

Have you got blood pressure? It is a phrase we sometimes hear in Occupational Health. Of course it is true. We all have blood pressure! But what exactly is blood pressure? How does it affect us? Why is it important to keep it under control? And what can we do to maintain a healthy blood pressure?

"Know your numbers!" is an annual awareness campaign, run by the Blood Pressure Society, that seeks to provide useful information into this very important, but sometimes misunderstood, health topic that is a basic lifestyle indicator.

Whenever you have a medical, whether at your GP surgery, in hospital, or as part of your workplace medical with Occupational Health, you are likely to have your blood pressure measured. Blood pressure is a good, reliable and easily-checked health measurement that can be an indicator or risk factor associated with other possible medical symptoms, for example heart disease or strokes. It will be measured sometimes using a mercury device or more commonly nowadays with a modern, electronic digital blood pressure machine.

This will show the blood pressure (in millimetres of mercury (mmHg) required for your heart to pump blood around your body at maximum exertion (systolic pressure - the top figure when the cuff is tight) and at rest when your arteries are fully dilated (diastolic pressure - the bottom figure when the cuff is loosened).

Blood pressure may vary according to the time of day it is measured, recent exercise or food/drink/smoke consumption, and can even show different measurements throughout the body. Typically, however, it is taken at the upper arm where a Velcro strap is attached to your arm and linked to a machine or pump. For some of us, having our blood pressure measured can in itself cause anxiety known as white coat syndrome. Your health practitioner will take account of this, and further tests may need to be done to determine whether you do suffer from high blood pressure (known as hypertension). The opposite, hypotension or low blood pressure, is less common in the workplace medical setting, but is equally important to avoid. If your blood pressure measurement is a bit high, your Adviser may recommend you see your GP or Practice Nurse; or perhaps if it is slightly high but does not require a GP appointment, you may choose to invest in your own machine. Many high street retailers sell reliable machines at a reasonable cost. and show these at a review appointment. Your Occupational Health Adviser will agree a plan with you.

There are some factors that may make you more susceptible to high blood pressure. Family history, alcohol consumption, dietary intake, poor exercise and smoking are typical causative factors for high blood pressure. Indeed your health practitioner will also take account of your blood pressure readings from previous medicals; previous blood pressure readings can act as a baseline for an overall health assessment, provided there are no other factors to consider, and assuming you are not experiencing any particular symptoms. Again, this will be discussed with you according to your personal circumstances.

The British Heart Foundation targets blood pressure to be below 140/85 mmHg, the Blood Pressure Society below 120/80 mmHg. So you can see there is some slight room for variation! If yours is higher, **don't worry!** Anxiety and stress can be a cause too. Have a close look at your lifestyle, and keep a diary of your diet, alcohol and exercise regimes. And stop or dramatically reduce smoking if you do smoke. Your Health Practitioner again will provide the support, guidance and advice you will need to help plan your lifestyle.

Finally, your Occupational Health Adviser will be pleased to go through your blood pressure readings and help you monitor it. You will also find a wealth of information online, including at [www.bpassoc.org.uk](http://www.bpassoc.org.uk) and [www.bhf.org.uk](http://www.bhf.org.uk). **National Blood Pressure Testing Awareness Week is 12<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> September 2011.** You will be able to find much more detail on blood pressure, what it means, how to read it, and where else to go for help and support. You will also find a wealth of information to help you make lifestyle adjustments and advice with regard to finding a blood pressure gauge that suits you.

But whatever you do, remember that there is much you can do to maintain a good healthy blood pressure. And as summer really kicks in, you will be able to dust down the bike or walking shoes, or enjoy a low-fat barbecue, safe in the knowledge that you are helping to keep your blood pressure at its optimum.

So relax, enjoy the summer, but find a few moments once in a while to keep an eye on those numbers!

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## HEALTH AWARENESS DATES FOR THE DIARY

July		September	
1-31	Sickle Cell Awareness Month <a href="http://www.sicklecellsociety.org/">www.sicklecellsociety.org/</a>	12-18	Know Your Numbers! <a href="http://www.bpassoc.org">www.bpassoc.org</a>
3-9	Dementia Awareness Week <a href="http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/">www.alzheimers.org.uk/</a>	12-18	Lymphatic Cancer Awareness Week <a href="http://www.lymphomas.org.uk/">www.lymphomas.org.uk/</a>
4-10	National Transplant Week <a href="http://www.organdonation.nhs.uk">www.organdonation.nhs.uk</a>	18-24	Rural Health Week <a href="http://www.rural-health.ac.uk/rural-health-week/">www.rural-health.ac.uk/rural-health-week/</a>
24	24/7Samaritans Awareness Day <a href="http://www.samaritans.org/">www.samaritans.org/</a>	18-24	Pituitary Awareness Week <a href="http://www.pituitary.org.uk">www.pituitary.org.uk</a>
August		19-25	CMT Awareness Week <a href="http://cmt.org.uk/">http://cmt.org.uk/</a>
1-7	WABA World Breastfeeding Week <a href="http://www.worldbreastfeedingweek.org/">www.worldbreastfeedingweek.org/</a>	19-25	Continence Awareness Week <a href="http://www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org">www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org</a>
22-28	Gut Week <a href="http://www.loveyourgut.com/">www.loveyourgut.com/</a>	19-25	Meningitis Awareness Week <a href="http://www.meningitis.org/">www.meningitis.org/</a>
September		21	World Alzheimer's Day <a href="http://www.alz.co.uk/">www.alz.co.uk/</a>
4-11	Fibromyalgia Awareness Week <a href="http://www.fibromyalgia-associationuk.org/">www.fibromyalgia-associationuk.org/</a>	25	International Ataxia Awareness Day <a href="http://www.ataxia.org.uk/">www.ataxia.org.uk/</a>
4-10	Migraine Awareness Week <a href="http://www.migraine.org.uk/">www.migraine.org.uk/</a>	28	World Rabies Day <a href="http://www.worldrabiesday.org/">www.worldrabiesday.org/</a>
10	World Suicide Prevention Day <a href="http://www.iasp.info/wspd/index.php">www.iasp.info/wspd/index.php</a>	29	World Heart Day <a href="http://www.world-heart-federation.org/">www.world-heart-federation.org/</a>
11-18	National Eczema Week <a href="http://www.eczema.org/">www.eczema.org/</a>	30	World's Biggest Coffee Morning <a href="http://coffee.macmillan.org.uk">http://coffee.macmillan.org.uk</a>
12-18	Sexual Health Week <a href="http://www.fpa.org.uk/">www.fpa.org.uk/</a>		

### Flu vaccine orders now being taken!

It may seem a little early to be thinking of flu but due to high demand last year, PTH recommends ordering flu vaccines as early as possible.

As in previous years, the vaccines are sold on a no return basis.

Please contact Emma Dales with your flu vaccine orders by **18 July 2011** via email: [emma.dales@pthgroup.co.uk](mailto:emma.dales@pthgroup.co.uk)

### Health Risks for employees working in the sun

According to the HSE, ultraviolet (UV) radiation should be considered an occupational hazard for people who work outdoors.

If you're an employer or manager responsible for people working outdoors for most of the day, you can download a leaflet from the HSE which gives advice on reducing the health risks for those employees working in the sun:  
[www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/issuesandrisk/sunprotection.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/issuesandrisk/sunprotection.htm)

Educating your employees on the benefits of staying safe in the sun can mean:

- Fewer absence days through sunburn
- A healthier and better informed workforce
- Reduced risk to employees of skin cancer from long-term sun exposure

Source: [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)