



Keep Talking About Mental Health

Second Survey of People Working for MINDFUL EMPLOYER Charter signatories

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Introduction

In 2013 we conducted a survey of people who worked for signatories to the MINDFUL EMPLOYER Charter for Employers who are Positive About Mental Health. Published as *Let's Talk About Mental Health*¹, that survey found that:

- In organisations who are Charter signatories, 3 in 5 employees have talked to their manager about a current mental health condition, suggesting increased confidence in being able to disclose such issues now compared with in the past.
- The most likely response to talking about a mental health condition is one where the manager listens, is supportive and is understanding – and not the negative response often feared.
- Charter signatories can do more to raise the profile of their commitment and is indicative of a link between awareness of the Charter commitment and the ability to talk about mental health.

This new document, ***Keep Talking About Mental Health*** presents the findings of a repeat survey carried out in Autumn 2015². The purpose being to draw a comparison with the 2013 survey and to identify any trends, improvements or deterioration in the experiences and views of people whose mental health affects their work and relationship with their employer.

Survey Responses

Reflecting the overall voluntary nature of MINDFUL EMPLOYER, it was up to each individual employer to decide how to action the request to send out the survey to their workforce. 633 Charter signatories³ were sent the survey.

All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and 2013 figures are shown in brackets.

4,041 (2,671) **people** provided a response: a significant increase on the 2013 survey.

62% (n=2,505) (67%) respondents stated they had personal experience of a mental health condition. 1,718 stated this was in the past and 1,048 were currently experiencing difficulties. 256 had both past and current issues.

The survey allowed respondents the option to add free text comments to three of the questions. Predictably, many of the 1,011 free text comments reflected difficult experiences and were critical of past and present employers, but others did record examples of good practice and helpful support. A sample of comments are included in this report, shown in italics.

¹ Let's Talk About Mental Health www.mindfulemployer.net/files/3713/9194/3720/Lets_Talk_About_Mental_Health.pdf

² See Appendix 1

³ Employers who had signed the Charter between 15 October 2004 and 22 March 2015 and were a current signatory as at 22 September 2015

Awareness of Charter Commitment

One aim of the survey was to determine the level of awareness among employees of their employer's Charter commitment.

To help publicise their commitment, every Charter signatory is provided with:

- The MINDFUL EMPLOYER logo to use on websites, letterheadings, staff newsletters etc
- Printed/electronic versions of the Charter with their company logo to display in premises
- Posters to display
- Sample copies of the *MINDFUL EMPLOYER Line Managers' Resource & Keeping Well at Work* booklet plus order forms for more copies

The findings in the 2015 survey are similar to those in 2013 and continue to indicate that effective communication of Charter commitment continues to be a challenge.

39% (40%) respondents knew their employer was a signatory before receiving the survey request. 78% (76%) of those had seen the logo.

Only 36% of people with a current mental health condition knew their employer was a Charter signatory – whereas 43% of the respondents who did not have a condition knew about it.

Of the total number of respondents, 30% (28%) had seen the MINDFUL EMPLOYER logo in or on materials associated with their workplace; 15% (14%) had seen the logo outside of work; 63% (64%) of respondents had never seen the logo. 11% (10%) did not know their employer was a signatory but had seen the logo at or outside of work.

Comparing overall levels of awareness across the sectors and sizes of organisations⁴ the survey found the following:

Sector	Aware employer is a signatory	Size (No. employees)	Aware employer is a signatory
Private	51% (35%)	Micro (1-9)	72% (82%)
Public	27% (32%)	Small (10-50)	75% (67%)
Voluntary	63% (64%)	Medium (51-250)	50% (51%)
		Large (250+)	30% (34%)

Table 1

There is a particularly encouraging increase in awareness in the private sector and, as observed in the last survey, the higher level of awareness in voluntary sector organisations also continues.

A previous MSc evaluation⁵ observed that communicating the Charter commitment to all staff was a particular challenge, especially in larger organisations. As in 2013, this new survey continues to support this finding and indicates that the larger the organisation, the less awareness there is among staff.

⁴ See also Appendix 2

⁵ FROST, R. (2012) Mindful Employer: Improving employer support for staff with mental health conditions. Exeter. Devon Partnership NHS Trust. <http://www.mindfulemployer.net/business/difference/>

While it is disappointing that the overall level of awareness among employees has remained approximately the same as in 2013, other information held by MINDFUL EMPLOYER⁶ paints an encouraging picture about the efforts of employers to raise awareness:

- 66% of signatories display the Charter in their premises
- 70% have the logo on their website
- 83% use the logo in printed materials
- 71% have made MINDFUL EMPLOYER publications available
- 82% have promoted the initiative in other ways.

Communicating information about any topic across an organisation is often difficult. The mismatch between the efforts of employers to publicise their Charter commitment and the level of awareness among staff indicates that getting this particular message across is a challenge – especially when, as will be seen in the next section of this report, **there is a clear link between awareness of the Charter commitment and the ability to talk about mental health.**

Talking about mental health

Despite the encouraging developments and initiatives of recent years (such as Time to Change) and the improving levels of openness, acknowledgement and acceptance of mental ill health in society and workplaces as a whole, there continues to remain a degree of reluctance to talk about it.

The 2015 survey found that, as in 2013, 50% of respondents with past experience of mental ill health had not talked to their then manager. Of those with a current mental health condition, 54% had talked to their manager (compared to 58% in 2013).

For those who did not feel able to talk to their manager, the survey found the following reasons:

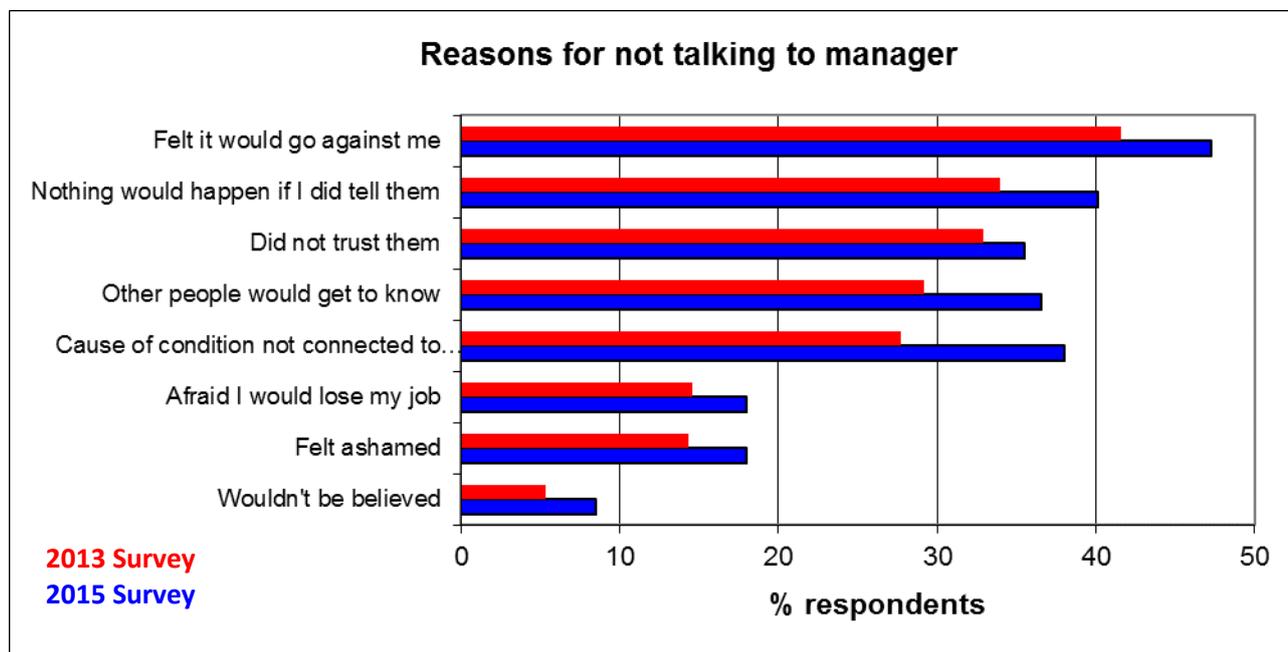


Figure 1 – respondents had option to select more than one reason

It has to be acknowledged that the above comparison of the surveys paints a rather depressing picture and potentially indicates increased concerns about what will happen if mental health conditions are disclosed or discussed with management.

⁶ Charter signatories are asked to provide examples of how they promote their commitment (e.g. use of the logo) when they complete a Review after two years and then every three years thereafter. In August 2015, we changed the Review process to enable us to collate more data about such promotional activity. Quoted data based on 84 completed Reviews.

Free text comments also demonstrate some very common concerns:

'Felt I would be judged and looked down on, other members (of staff) would be told and it would become a 'joke'.'

'Too much turnover of line manager to establish an atmosphere of trust or that they even care or are listening.'

'I am seen as a very strong person and I imagine this would be seen as out of character and not possible. I may, of course, be wrong. But I am private about some things and admitting "publicly" about how I feel about things mentally, would be a sign of weakness (for me) and I (strongly) feel used against me by some.'

'Manager not interested in anything but work output of their employees.'

'I have heard my supervisor make negative comments about people with anxiety or stress disorders and would not feel comfortable discussing it with them.'

'I tried to tell them I was not coping with the work I was doing and was told to get on with it.'

However, more positively, the survey found that for employees who had a current mental health condition and who knew their employer was a signatory - 66% had talked to their manager (compared to 46% in 2013).

This finding further supports the clear link between awareness of the Charter commitment and the ability to talk about mental health.

And, as figure 2 indicates, there are encouraging signs of an increase in the level of positive responses to such disclosure:



Figure 2 – respondents had option to select more than one answer

The above comparison of surveys appears to indicate an encouraging consolidation in the response and reaction from employers.

This new survey shows that the most likely response to disclosure continues to be one where the manager listens, is supportive and is understanding.

Signposting to occupational health and other employer-provided support (e.g. employee assistance programmes) are also shown to be common responses. Responses from managers also indicate that keeping in touch while off sick and help with planning the return to work were valuable interventions.

The survey shows a relatively low emphasis on bringing in external supporting agencies⁷ although experience would indicate this is probably due in part to lack of awareness or provision of such services at a local level. Involvement of supporting agencies and increased contact with someone's GP or supporting healthcare professionals is to be encouraged. With consent of the individual concerned, involving other independent expertise can provide useful support, information and advice for all concerned.

As was the case in 2013, comparing figure 1 with figure 2 provides some valuable insights in to issues which could be termed as 'perception vs reality' – where fears are not necessarily borne out in what happens:

- The most common reason for not disclosing was fear it would go against them (fig 1), yet the least common response was disciplinary action (fig 2).
- The second most common reason for not disclosing was the belief that nothing would happen (fig 1), yet the outcome of 'did not do anything' is low down on the list of responses (fig 2).
- Lack of trust is the third most common reason for not disclosing (fig 1) yet the response of a manager telling other people without permission is second from the bottom (fig 2).

Even when disclosure takes place, a positive response is not guaranteed but free text comments showed an encouraging range of good practice taking place:

'Provided me with help and practical guidance during a tough period of my life and I have come through this successfully and the support of my manager and team has helped a great deal.'

'Contacted my GP on the day I initially fell ill, got me seen and helped get me on the right path immediately. Was superb.'

'She gave me an hour a week off work to see my counsellor.'

'Fantastic experience. I told my manager after struggling for a few months as I was frightened that my anxiety/depression would affect my right to practice. Talking to them really helped to put my mind at ease. They were really supportive and asked how I would like the issue to be addressed within the department (return following absence). I felt confident enough to send a brief department-wide email giving details that I felt happy to share. The entire department have been excellent, haven't treated me differently and been very supportive.'

'I was not off work and just wanted to talk so my manager is aware of how I am feeling. I wanted a listening ear and support which I received.'

'I can usually manage my feelings of being low/anxious but I had a 'melt down' during a very busy period at work and my manager was really helpful and understanding. I felt embarrassed and thought it would go against me as I thought I looked weak and I worried I'd given the impression that I couldn't cope when I strived so hard to keep up with everything. I was wrong as my manager praised me for my hard efforts and offered help. She said she wished I'd said something sooner but it was pride that held me back from doing so.'

'Allowed me to come into work at a later time - provided me with good feedback, allowing me to feel good about my work and not define my work by my condition - didn't penalise me for taking lots of sick days - used her discretion to help me pass probation and annual appraisal - used her discretion to allow me to work less

⁷ For example, Workways, run by Devon Partnership NHS Trust, which provides an independent job retention service. www.workways.org.uk. Details of other local services can be found at www.mindfulemployer.net/contact

hours without it affecting my pay - supported my career ambitions and allowed me time off to attend training to help me feel that my illness doesn't have a negative impact my career - gives me a sense of achievement - met with my Access to Work/Remploy consultant - doesn't complain when I'm not able to make it into work at the later time agreed - worked through a Wellness Recovery Action Plan with me - asks how she can support me.'

'Gave me the confidence to return to work.'

While respondents identified a range of other ways in which their employer could have been helpful, both in the specific survey responses and free text comments, figure 3 indicates that a significant number felt the organisation had done as much as it could:

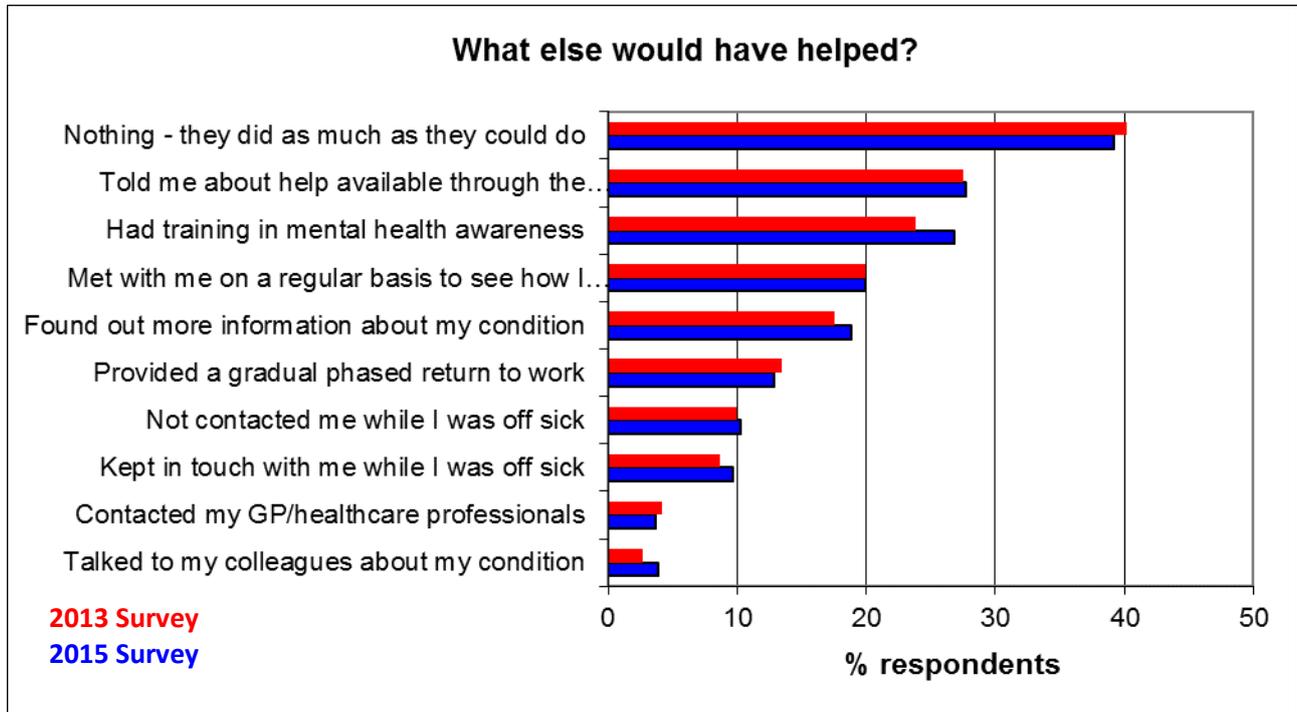


Figure 3 – respondents had option to select more than one answer

As was recognised in the MSc evaluation and the 2013 survey, the need to provide information about mental health conditions and for line managers to undertake mental health awareness training continues to be supported⁸.

Employers appear to be increasingly recognising the need for providing training – information from Charter Reviews indicates that 95% of signatories provide some form of mental health awareness training. In the period between these two surveys, Workways (which runs MINDFUL EMPLOYER) has seen a 253% increase in the number of workshops it delivers in comparison to the preceding two years.

There is also a notable increase in the desire for other colleagues to know more (with consent). As in 2013, this survey reflects the continuing debate about whether or not to contact someone while they are off sick and the increase in people wanting to keep in touch is encouraging. Good practice and advice continues to affirm that it is important for employers and employees to maintain contact during absence.

⁸ Details of mental health awareness workshops are available at www.mindfulemployer.net/awareness and information about conditions can be found at www.nhs.uk

The free text comments also provided many suggestions and reflections with some common themes:

'Been more flexible to help me better manage my work. Encouraged flexibility of time so I could take time out to attend therapies.'

'Provided an on-call service or given me a work buddy that I could call when I felt I was struggling at work. My mental health condition leads me to become very paranoid at times and often just knowing someone is at the other end of the phone can make a bad day a good one. All I need is for someone to help me rationalise my thoughts and reassure me that they are not real. I think this would be a very helpful tool for anyone struggling with a mental health condition. Often going to work seems unfeasible on a bad day because you worry that if you start to struggle at work it could be embarrassing or unbearable. If ... introduced a buddy system whereby you know you can talk to someone who understands, it would make going to work feel much easier and minimise those "I just can't face it" days.'

'Ensured I had a return to work meeting as soon as I returned, not the day after. Unfortunately, returning without this, meant by a default of always processing emails, I accidentally overloaded myself and worked through 200+ emails on my first day back, working a longer than usual day, and burning out again.'

'Coming back to work was difficult due to the anxiety I was suffering at the time. This was not helped by the very formal meetings regarding sick absence where a director was present and gave me warnings about sick absence. A more understanding and supportive approach would have been very gratefully received.'

And a particularly common response is summed up by this comment:

'Been more interested in sorting the cause of problem: as although I am coping, the situation has not changed and the problems still exist.'

Summary

This new survey continues to show awareness of the Charter among employees but indicates difficulties in getting the message across. **Communicating this commitment is a challenge especially as there is a clear link between the level of awareness of the Charter and the ability to talk about mental health.**

The importance of such awareness is supported by the finding that **two-thirds of employees with a current mental health condition who knew their employer was a signatory were able to talk to their manager** about their situation.

The survey indicates **increased concerns about talking about mental ill health** but, as in 2013, the **most likely response to talking about a mental health condition is one where the manager listens, is supportive and is understanding – and not the negative response often feared.**

There are clear indications that **providing information and mental health awareness training, involving external supporting agencies and increased contact with someone's GP or healthcare professional are all to be encouraged.**

Being a Charter signatory is a long-term commitment. It takes time to change workplace attitudes and cultures and this survey indicates the importance of ensuring such change continues to take place.

Appendix 1

The MINDFUL EMPLOYER Advisory Group⁹, an independent group of employers who support and advise Workways (a service of Devon Partnership NHS Trust) in running the initiative, recognise the importance of gaining views of employees of Charter signatories. These views serve to both complement information being provided by employers in their Charter Reviews and influence further good practice. It's also recognised that gathering such views may challenge areas of poorer work practices and policies, and prompt action to improve them. Like the first one, this new survey would also give some indication about the overall level of awareness about MINDFUL EMPLOYER. This survey of the views of employees and this report of its findings are not presented as an academic study.

The 2015 Survey is identical to that carried out in 2013. The original survey was developed by the Advisory Group in conjunction with staff at Workways using the web-based Survey Monkey facility (www.surveymonkey.co.uk) through an account held by Devon Partnership NHS Trust. Both surveys were completely anonymous and neither respondents nor their employer could be identified. The Survey questionnaire was made available to employers who were a current Charter signatory of more than six months standing¹⁰. Preceded by an explanatory e-mail the day before, a second e-mail containing the survey link was sent to the contact person for each employer on 22 September 2015. This went to 633 (578 in 2013) employers. The Survey was open to contributions from 22 September to 4 November 2015 (the same length of time as the 2013 survey).

Appendix 2

Respondents identified themselves as working in a particular sector and size of organisation and these are shown below in comparison with the overall sample of 633 employers who received the request for the Survey (2013 figures shown in brackets):

	Proportion of Respondents	Overall sample of employers who received survey
Private	12% (16%)	23% (21%)
Public	63% (63%)	39% (43%)
Voluntary	24% (21%)	38% (37%)

Size (No. employees)	Proportion of Respondents	Overall sample of employers who received survey
Micro (1-9)	1% (1%)	9% (12%)
Small (10-50)	9% (7%)	24% (21%)
Medium (51-250)	22% (17%)	20% (16%)
Large (250+)	69% (75%)	47% (52%)

Size (No. employees)	Has talked to manager
Micro (1-9)	87% (75%)
Small (10-50)	63% (78%)
Medium (51-250)	56% (51%)
Large (250+)	49% (58%)

Sector	Has talked to manager
Private	49% (56%)
Public	48% (57%)
Voluntary	62% (66%)

⁹ Previously called the Council of Reference

¹⁰ i.e. employers who had signed the Charter between 15 October 2004 and 22 March 2015 and were a current signatory as at 22 September 2015.

Appendix 3 – The Survey Questions

Introduction

MINDFUL EMPLOYER is an NHS initiative which provides employers with easier access to information, support and training in relation to staff who experience anxiety, depression or other mental health conditions.

Your employer is a signatory to the MINDFUL EMPLOYER Charter for Employers who are Positive About Mental Health, which is a set of aspirations to help employers work towards better practice. It is not an accreditation or a set of quality standards - and is a completely voluntary commitment.

We'd be very grateful if you could complete this survey - it should take you no more than 10 minutes.

We want to gather views of all employees, not just those who have a mental health condition. The purpose of the survey is to enable better support to be put in place for people experiencing a mental health condition and also aid prevention. The findings will also help us to develop the MINDFUL EMPLOYER initiative. This Survey is identical to one we carried out in 2013 so will enable us to draw some comparisons and trends. (If you completed the previous one please do so again now to reflect your experience since then.)

This survey is confidential and completely anonymised - neither you nor your employer can be identified by MINDFUL EMPLOYER. That level of anonymity also means that your employer is not aware that you have responded and no one in your organisation will receive details of your response.

MINDFUL EMPLOYER is run by Workways, a service of Devon Partnership NHS Trust. If you have any questions about this survey please tel: 01392 677064 or email info@mindfulemployer.net

Closing date for responding is 4 November 2015.

Once responses have been collated by MINDFUL EMPLOYER they will be deleted from the Survey Monkey site.

1. Before you were sent this survey, were you aware that your employer is a signatory to the MINDFUL EMPLOYER Charter for Employers who are Positive About Mental Health?*

Yes

No

2. Have you seen the MINDFUL EMPLOYER logo (see the top of the page) on display, publications, website, letterheadings, forms etc?*

Yes - at work

Yes - outside work (e.g. job adverts, internet)

No

3. Your employer cannot be identified - do you work in the...

Public sector (e.g. civil service, local government, education, health)

Private sector (e.g. business, social enterprise/social firm)

Voluntary/Third sector (e.g. charity)

4. ... and approximately how many people work for the organisation as a whole?

Less than 10

10-50

51-250

Over 250

5. Do you manage/supervise staff?

Yes

No

6. This survey is anonymous - you cannot be identified. Have you experienced anxiety, depression or another mental health condition (e.g. bipolar, psychosis, schizophrenia, drug/alcohol dependency, eating disorder) at any time in your life ?

Yes - in the past

Yes - currently

No - thank you: you have now completed the survey, please click done

7. Have you been able to talk to your manager/supervisor about your condition?

Yes – go to question 8

No – go to question 9

8. What was the response of your manager/supervisor... (you may tick more than one box)

Supportive
Understanding
Took disciplinary action
Did not do anything
Suggested company support (e.g. employee assistance programme, counselling)
Referred me to occupational health
Involved HR
Contacted my GP/healthcare professionals supporting me
Helped me to plan my return to work
Kept in touch with me while I was off sick
Told other people without my permission
Brought in an external support agency
Listened
Talked with me about what to tell colleagues
Got help from another manager
Other (please specify)

- Please go to question 10

9. Please tick words/phrases which best describe your reason for not talking to them... (you may tick more than one box)

Did not trust them
Felt it would go against me
Cause of condition not connected to work
Nothing would happen if I did tell them
Wouldn't be believed
Felt ashamed
Afraid I would lose my job
Other people would get to know
Other (please specify)

10. What else would it have been helpful for your employer to have done in your situation? (You may tick more than one box)

Found out more information about my condition
Kept in touch with me while I was off sick
Not contacted me while I was off sick
Talked to my colleagues about my condition
Had training in mental health awareness
Told me about help available through the organisation
Nothing - they did as much as they could do
Contacted my GP/healthcare professionals helping me
Provided a gradual phased return to work
Met with me on a regular basis to see how I was doing
Other (please specify)

Thank you for your time and for completing this survey.

A compilation of the responses received will be published on our website at www.mindfulemployer.net after which all individual responses will be deleted from the Survey Monkey website.

If you manage or supervise staff, the *MINDFUL EMPLOYER Line Managers' Resource* contains information and guidance about supporting employees with a mental health condition. We have also published a companion booklet for all staff, *Keeping Well at Work* containing hints and tips about looking after your health and wellbeing. Your employer has copies of both booklets - please contact us if you are unable to find out who has them or order them online at www.mindfulemployer.net. You may also like to visit our website to download *Making Work Work* which helps to support having conversations with staff and managers and *Feeling Stressed, Keeping Well* to help you to manage your own wellbeing.

We also provide mental health awareness training for managers and staff - more details are available from our website.

MINDFUL EMPLOYER is run by Workways, a service of Devon Partnership NHS Trust.

For more information please visit www.mindfulemployer.net or tel: 01392 677064 or email info@mindfulemployer.net

Please click 'Done' to submit your response

Thank you