

NEWS BULLETIN

Mental Fitness Gym

The Issue

The pandemic caused an unprecedented disruption to the shipping industry. Seafarers were impacted on a global scale. The exposure of seafarers to work related stress has been exacerbated by the uncertainties of the pandemic. Hundreds of thousands of seafarers were left stranded working aboard ships beyond the expiry of their initial contracts since the outbreak of the pandemic.

Due to heavy workload, extended contracts, isolation, separation from families, and the risk of exposure to traumatic events, seafarers often experience anxiety and depression. In addition, they suffer from stress, mental fatigue, exhaustion and numerous physical health problems. The combination of these factors makes seafarers more prone to illnesses, injuries and poor performance. This situation has now been further impacted by the crisis in Ukraine which unfortunately will see more strain placed upon seafarers especially those from the badly affected areas of Ukraine.

Mental Resilience

A key feature of good mental health is resilience. This is the ability to overcome stress and maintain an effective performance level when facing struggles and challenges. The benefits of resilience apply across all high stress environments, including the shipping industry. Evidence shows that resilience can be strengthened through active practice.

The Solution

The Mental Fitness Gym: Mental resilience can be compared to a muscle. When an individual is exposed to prolonged periods of depression along with negative emotions and thoughts, the resilience gets depleted and the resilience muscle gets weaker. On the other hand, through cultivating certain practices and mental exercises, it becomes stronger. As a result, an individual becomes more resilient and can handle daily challenges better. We use this analogy to reflect the research which shows that through regular practice, individuals can create changes in their brain which allows them to form strong habits and cultivate positive responses to stressors. The gym analogy helps us all to understand the concept easily, relate to it and engage in regular practice.



The Benefits

Reduced anxiety and depression; improved quality of sleep; stress reduction; less fatigue; feeling refreshed; enhanced performance; greater alertness; enhanced problem solving; gaining a new perspective on stressful situations; enhanced focus and concentration; less emotional reactivity; increased self-esteem; reduced rumination; improved relationships; a more positive outlook on life; a boost to the immune system; increased job satisfaction.

The Programme

Prevention is the key. The Mental Fitness Gym is based on the concept of reducing the risk of deteriorating mental health, building and maintaining mental resilience before situations develop, before professional help is required or in the worst-case scenario, before it is too late. In our programme we focus on developing good habits, small habits are small components of a larger vision. We have broken down improvement of mental fitness into smaller more achievable chunks that seafarers can build up over time. Those small habits help complete the big goal, which is reducing the number of cases and incidents that are attributed to poor mental wellbeing. The tools we will provide have proven to be highly effective for people working in high stress occupations and people exposed to trauma and traumatic events. The concept of simplicity manifests in simple guidance, simple practices, in a simple language, so that the crew will find it easy to incorporate new routines into their daily life.

The Material

We will provide monthly bite-size guided mental exercises and resources for seafarers to regularly engage in. The programme is based on research and evidence in the fields of neuroscience, mindfulness, emotional intelligence and positive psychology. All material is provided by Impact Wellbeing and will be available digitally for all crew on vessels where there is crew internet to access and download on their personal devices so that they may use the programme at their own pace.

The material ranges from audio and video clips to handouts and pictorials. We will work closely with Impact Wellbeing to ensure we target the right areas of mental wellbeing for our crew. The first three months' subjects are breathing techniques, worry and anxiety and focus and concentration. We are also working on a module that will help with dealing with conflict onboard.

We look forward with great anticipation, to our crew engaging in this programme and identifying what will be useful for them. We appreciate that some of the modules might not be for everybody, but we do truly believe that across the whole programme there will be something of benefit for each and every crew member.

