

Crew health: Maintaining mental wellbeing

The Club would like to thank Dr Olivia Swift of Royal Holloway, University of London, for contributing this article.

Owners know that their seafarers health is of paramount importance and, in recent years, we've become more alert to the importance of seafarers' mental as well as physical wellbeing.

Given the challenges of their working lives it's not surprising that seafarers are more likely to suffer from mental health problems than the general population, especially depression and anxiety. In extreme cases, this can result in seafarers taking their own lives. According to research comparing different industries' suicide rates, only coal mining fares worse.

Symptoms may mask mental health concerns

Seafarers' conditions vary across industries and there is a need to better minimise, identify and remedy mental health problems among crews. Mental health continues to be a cause of Club claims and because mental health problems are under reported, especially among contractual workers, Club data is unlikely to paint an accurate picture of the extent to which mental health is an issue among our particular tonnage of smaller and more specialist vessels. It is also likely that some claims relating to pain, such as back, or stomach pain, may mask accompanying mental health concerns.

Social isolation and how intervention can help

The causes of mental health problems among seafarers often relate to their social isolation. For many, being socially isolated is unproblematic but for others, we need to think about how it can be lessened – through measures that improve the cohesion of crew and through improved communications with loved one back home.

In continuation with our partnership with ISWAN we would like to draw attention to two articles. The first focuses on social isolation – what it is, what causes it, how it differs to loneliness and how it can result in mental ill-health. It goes on to consider ways in which both social isolation and mental ill-health can be addressed.

The second article evaluates what research tells us about how different types and levels of communication with home affect seafarers' mental wellbeing and crew cohesion. In particular, it looks at the role of digital technology including the effects of social media, online gaming and internet and mobile technologies that support mental wellbeing, such as apps and online counselling. Encouragingly, there is increasing evidence that a number of relatively simple

interventions can make a real difference. These articles can be accessed by clicking the links below:

- [The social isolation of seafarers](#)
- [Digital technology and seafarers mental wellbeing](#)

Guidance and materials to use on board

ISWAN has produced three posters to help promote mental wellbeing on board, which we are able to offer our Members to download. These guidelines can be downloaded from the right hand side of the page or by clicking the links below:

- [Drugs cause mental problems](#)
- [Your mental state is part of your life](#)
- [Sound mind sound body](#)

This article is the seventh in a series of articles in which the Club shares guidance and practical tips to our Members to promote good crew health on board. [All articles in this series can be viewed here.](#)