The benefits of balance

Complementary gym memberships and private healthcare have long been the pillars of premium employee benefits, but in recent years the focus has broadened significantly. Firms are wising up to the fact that fit, healthy, and fundamentally happy employees are essential to the success of a business, and now offer a broad range of services ranging from therapy to tai chi. Here, representatives from the Wibl group’s sponsors describe what their firms are doing to ensure the health and wellbeing of staff across the business.

DLA Piper
By diversity and inclusion manager Mitra Janes

At DLA Piper, we take our obligations to provide a safe and healthy place of work for our staff extremely seriously. From a health and wellbeing perspective, one of the key topics we are focusing on currently is mental health, specifically, raising awareness and challenging the stigma of mental health issues and promoting mental wellbeing.

Why are we focusing on mental health?
We know that in any given year, one in four people will experience a mental health issue, and that lawyers are three times more likely to experience depression than non-lawyers. There are multiple potential factors underlying this: some may be associated with the type of person more likely to want to become a lawyer (high performing, competitive, driven), but some may relate to the nature of a firm - long hours culture, high levels of pressure and the demanding nature of the role. As a responsible business, it’s important that we take steps to address this.

In October, to coincide with World Mental Health Awareness Day, we held events, seminars and workshops in every region across the firm. In the UK, we focused on resilience. Research shows that resilient teams perform better under pressure; enjoy higher quality cognitive functioning, such as concentration, memory, decision making, innovation and creativity; have better physical health and are more effective at positively influencing and motivating others. The seminar we ran helped to explain the impact of our own emotions and mood on our thoughts and behaviours, and provided insights on how we can increase our psychological resilience and wellbeing.

We’ve also shared a set of ‘top tips’ for taking care of your mental health. It’s important to remind people of who they can contact if they need more support. Our Employee Assistance Program offers free, confidential information and support on a wide range of topics to help our people lead and maintain a healthy lifestyle. These services are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and address a wide range of emotional and physical health issues, and home and work life challenges through a combination of information, advice and counselling.

Linklaters
By diversity talent & engagement advisor Jenny Mabey

At Linklaters the health and wellbeing of our people is recognised as a critical business issue for the firm globally, and is a key part of our global human resources strategy.

The focus of our health and wellbeing strategy is to, firstly, help our people take responsibility for their physical and mental health and build their resilience and, secondly, to guide our partners and leaders to support the health and wellbeing of people in their teams, recognise and address the signs of ill health (mental and physical), and refer people to resources the firm provides to help and support.

We recognise that mental health is just as important as physical health, which is why we are a founding member of the City Mental Health Alliance, which was established in 2013.

Our approach to health and wellbeing is a key part of our collective responsibility and delivering our deal to our people. The UK programme is structured around monthly topics covering all aspects of health and wellbeing including nutrition, exercise, sleep and financial health. Every October, we run a targeted mental health and resilience programme to coincide with World Mental Health Day. Globally, many of our other offices are starting to look at their health and wellbeing offering, and we have established a global network to share best practice and generate new ideas.
Shearman & Sterling
By partner Kristen Garry

Lawyers know all too well the psychological and physical toll that our intellectually challenging, high stakes and time-intensive work can place on us. As such, it is important for law firms to provide their employees with resources that enable them to take control of their health and wellbeing. As a type 1 diabetic who uses an insulin pump and continuous glucose monitor, I fully appreciate the importance of staying mindful of one’s health.

Shearman & Sterling has long embraced a culture of wellness through various initiatives, including health fairs which we host several times per year. These fairs introduce employees to the many firm partnerships focused on wellness, such as special gym rates, flexible spending options, life/balance information providers, hospital corporate care programmes, and more.

In our Washington DC office, we look for opportunities to come together in support of our health. We’ve long participated in the Lawyers Have Heart 10k Race, 5k Run & Walk in Georgetown. Lawyers Have Heart supports the American Heart and Stroke Associations and brings people together for a great cause. And our Washington DC office has a gym open to all of our employees. As a result, cycling to work is very popular, as is running and working out during the day or evening.

Shearman & Sterling offers a host of other resources focused on wellness to its employees across the globe, including an intranet page dedicated to wellbeing. On a monthly basis, the wellbeing page suggests ways in which everyone can help themselves by providing information on healthy choices and relaxation. When it comes to health and wellbeing, people need to be reminded that even small changes to their perspective and routine can generate positive results.

White & Case
By head of human resources Lila Pease

White & Case has long been a supporter of health and wellbeing in the workplace. The firm’s flexible benefits scheme offers a number of benefits that contribute to the health and wellbeing of our employees such as free annual medicals, the cycle-to-work scheme, discounted gym memberships and access to private GP services. We are especially proud of the Wellness Account, which is an annual £500 cash benefit that employees can spend on activities that support a healthy lifestyle. This can be anything from a variety of exercise classes such as kickboxing, yoga, pilates and tai chi; to relaxation services such as aromatherapy or massage treatments; sports classes for swimming, martial arts, golf and more, and even acupuncture for smoking cessation and other conditions.

We have recently introduced an on-site health kiosk which provides health checks for blood pressure, body fat, heart rate, height, weight and body mass index, as well as an indication of your current heart age, all in less than 10 minutes. The output provides targeted results that can be linked with the NHS Choices website or mobile app. The kiosk is a great complement to the various on-site biometric screenings and education provided throughout the year. We also plan to launch a steps challenge using Fitbits or other tracking devices next year to encourage setting personal health targets that the kiosk can support throughout the year.

2016 will also see a focus on mental health wellbeing and awareness across the firm, with the implementation of resilience training, mental health first aid training, and seminars from leading experts in the field. We will also make available free weekly on-site therapy sessions to provide confidential psychological support with qualified counsellors in a convenient private setting.

Workplace comfort and ergonomics is another focus that will allow employees to do a virtual assessment of their comfort level at work, and provide instructions on how to modify workstations to suit their needs as well as engage in certain physical exercises to provide relief.

Our objective is to create a culture of overall physical and mental health awareness by providing convenient and continuous support through confidential, trusted resources that will assist in setting and reaching personal goals and milestones.

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