

- Mental health

'COVID-19 crisis highlights urgent need to support employee wellbeing'

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Dr Nick Taylor is the chief executive and co-founder of the UK-based Unmind, a workplace mental health platform that provides clinically-backed tools and training to create healthier, happier and more human organisations.



As a lead clinical psychologist in the UK's National Health Service (NHS) in 2015, Dr Taylor faced the challenges of managing absenteeism, presenteeism, and turnover among highly pressured frontline staff. Determined to find a solution, he discovered that, by combining clinical science with corporate wellness, organisations could help their teams to proactively nurture their own mental health, and in turn boost productivity.

Dr Taylor will be speaking at the Wellbeing @ Work Middle East Summit that will take place between February 22-24, 2021.

As an expert in wellbeing and mental health in the workplace, what main challenges do you think organisations are facing at the moment?

The organisations around the world are facing challenges, the likes of which we haven't seen in a generation. The most pressing perhaps is supporting the wellbeing of our workforces through this period. Most people fortunate enough to still be in employment won't have avoided having their work-life balances drastically disrupted. Our personal and professional lives have blurred and now we have to wear many hats – whether that's as carers, teachers, or within our roles.

Another challenge is maintaining the steady operation – let alone innovation – in the face of so much uncertainty. Our abilities to plan for the 'next normal' are compromised by this ambiguity, which is why we need to focus on individual and organisational resilience.

What strategies have you seen developing globally over the past 6-12 months during the pandemic to address mental health in the workplace? The COVID-19 crisis caused a tipping point in the mental health agenda, highlighting the very real and urgent need for employers to support the wellbeing of their people. The three increasingly prominent strategies include: Businesses are realising the importance of proactive and preventative mental health support, rather than just reactive measures. Employees need the right care at the right time.

As our personal and professional lives have become increasingly blurred, businesses need to think about how they take a whole-person approach to employee mental health. This means not only supporting psychological health, but also social and physical wellbeing.

The third emerging strategy is the dominance of digital mental health support. With the prevalence of remote and geographically dispersed mental health. I would say prevention truly is better than cure.

What are you most looking forward to about the virtual Wellbeing @ Work Middle East event this month? I am so excited to hear about how HR, wellbeing, benefit and business leaders from across the Middle East are supporting the mental wellbeing of their people. I find it so inspiring to be part of a global workplace wellbeing movement and can't wait to learn from others leading the charge in this region. capabilities of technology to sustain social connections, tend to focus on our health, maintain productivity, and support our wellbeing.

In order to get through the coming months we should: Keep connecting with each other with whatever tools at our disposal; remain flexible and empathetic with one another; remember to carve out time for ourselves to connect with what we find meaningful – whether that's family, nature, exercise or hobbies and prioritise both our mental and physical health with daily exercise for each.

How has your organisation been leading the way to deal with the situation over the last 12 months?

We have been fortunate enough to experience growth in the last 12 months, which has meant onboarding many incredible new people to our organisation. We have worked with field experts to ensure our platform content, support and resources have remained at the forefront of our users' needs. And we have used our reach and various communications channels to provide as much relevant and useful information around supporting our mental health as possible.

(Dr Nick Taylor will be interviewing Ellen Dubois du Bellay, chief human resources officer of Jumeriah Group, at Wellbeing @ Work Middle East Summit that takes place on February 22-24, 2021. For further details on the summit, please go to <https://fowinsights.com>)