

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID IN CONSTRUCTION

Terence Curran, Chief Operating Officer **The Amphibious Group**

The idea of mental health has a long and complex history. Mental health problems have been described in ancient texts dating back to the Greeks and Romans, who believed that mental illness was caused by an imbalance of bodily humor. In the Middle Ages, mental illness was often seen as a sign of possession by demons or spirits, and those who were mentally ill were often subjected to cruel and inhumane treatment.

It wasn't until the 19th century that mental illness began to be recognized as a medical condition, and institutions were established for their treatment. However, these institutions were often overcrowded and understaffed, and the treatment provided was often as cruel and inhumane as the mistreatment of the Middle Ages. In the mid-20th century, the development of new medications and therapies led to significant improvements in the treatment of mental illness and the deinstitutionalization movement, which aimed to move patients out of psychiatric hospitals and into community-based care. Today, mental health is recognized as an essential aspect of overall health and well-being, and there is a growing recognition of the need for early intervention and preventative measures to address mental health issues. Which has led to the creation of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA). MHFA is an important skill that is gaining recognition in many industries, including construction. Mental health is a critical aspect of overall health and well-being and is just as important as physical health. Unfortunately, it is often overlooked and sometimes ignored in the workplace. This is especially true in the construction industry, where workers are exposed to long hours, dangerous working conditions, and high levels of stress.



The construction industry is recognized as one of the most hazardous industries in the world, with a high rate of injuries, fatalities, and illnesses. The construction industry has changed over the last decade, by providing on-site medical support to its employees such as full-time medical facilities staffed by EMTs, Paramedics, Registered Nurses, and Physician Assistants. Transitioning from ghost medics sitting in a trailer to a Wellness coach in a Health and Wellbeing clinic, focusing on nutrition, and a healthy workforce. Still today, though, it is also an industry that has historically struggled with mental health issues. Workers in the construction industry are at increased risk for developing mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, and PTSD. This is due in part to the high levels of stress, exposure to traumatic events, and the physical demands of the job and a workforce of men and women on-site with an average age of 45 or greater. With an aging workforce and a smaller workforce joining the industry each year we can see an increase in the need to focus on more than treating and recognizing injuries and illnesses beyond our physical health.

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In 2020 during safety week, two of my fellow colleagues and myself were conducting a suicide awareness speech and providing a Health and Wellness clinic in Sacramento, CA on one of our client's job sites. During the speech, we spoke about Mental Health and the persona behind "men are men and shouldn't speak of their problems or show weakness". At the completion of the speech and start of the wellness screening, a gentleman approached us and stated, "Today is my last day". This gentleman was struggling with several issues and just needed someone to talk to. Over the course of two hours, the team got him the help he needed. After this incident and a few others when I was approached by two of my Operations Managers Michael Porter and Andrew Wesley about adding MHFA as an offering to our clients and staff I approved the investment to develop a program to better support our clients and its staff members.

MHFA is a skill that can help construction workers recognize and respond to mental health issues in their colleagues. MHFA is a training program that provides individuals with the skills and knowledge they need to support someone who may be experiencing a mental health crisis. The program includes topics such as recognizing the signs and symptoms of mental health problems, aiding and support, and connecting individuals with appropriate resources.

Training in MHFA can help workers in the construction industry to:

- Recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health issues.
- Provide appropriate support and assistance to colleagues in distress.

- Reduce the stigma surrounding mental health problems.
- Connect individuals with appropriate resources and services.
- Build a supportive workplace culture.
- Improve overall well-being and job satisfaction.

Given the high-stress environment, tight schedules, long hours, and hazardous working conditions in the construction industry, it is essential to prioritize workers' mental health and well-being. Offering MHFA training can help promote a safe, supportive, and healthy workplace culture. As a MHFA attendant you do not have to have a medical background to support your colleagues, the program is here to help support you and empower you to be of service to a fellow worker in need. It may also help reduce the stigma surrounding mental health problems and encourage workers to seek help when needed.

The construction industry has a critical role to play in addressing mental health issues among its workers. By providing training in MHFA, employers can help to create a safe and supportive workplace culture that prioritizes the well-being of all workers. This can lead to improved job satisfaction, reduced absenteeism, and increased retention rates. Ultimately, investing in workers' mental health is not only the right thing to do, but it is also a smart business decision.

Our slogan is "Present and Prepared", are you?!