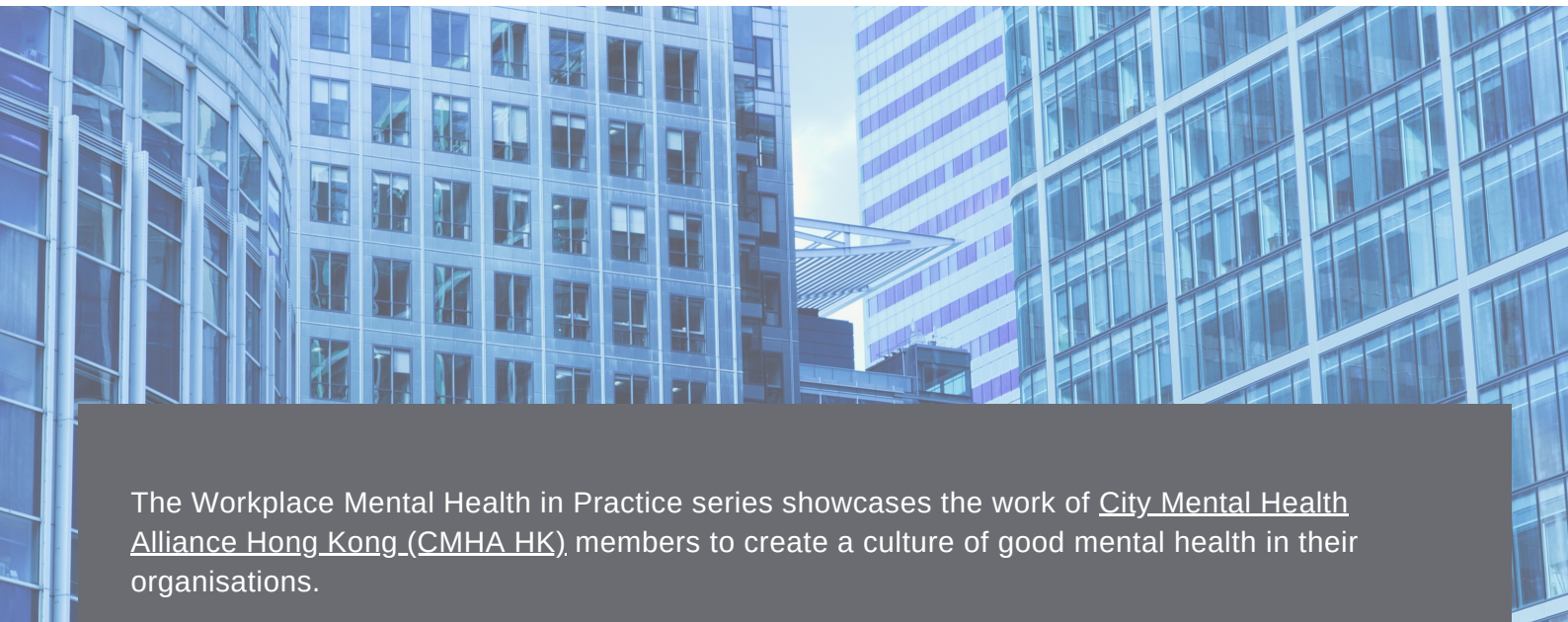




WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH IN PRACTICE

FOCUS ON: LINKLATERS



The Workplace Mental Health in Practice series showcases the work of City Mental Health Alliance Hong Kong (CMHA HK) members to create a culture of good mental health in their organisations.

The third edition of our series focuses on global law firm Linklaters. **Gilbert Li, Partner** shares the mental health and wellbeing journey over the past five years with a particular focus on the power of storytelling.

Can you tell us about how your organisation started working on mental health?

About five years ago we started to focus on mental health within the firm. At the time, mental health was not widely spoken about in the legal field.

Our initial challenge was getting everyone comfortable engaging with the topic. We began by making mental health and wellbeing the topic of some of our regular lunch and learn sessions, which until that point had usually only focused on legal topics.

Getting staff comfortable talking about mental health has been a slow process, but we have now reached a point where people are much more engaged.

Did you use storytelling to open the conversation?

In our experience, storytelling has been a very powerful medium.

Around three years ago, we released a video at our global partners meeting, featuring partners from the London office talking about their experiences with mental health. It was well received by partners, who

subsequently shared it with their teams in their own offices and facilitated discussions around it.

Following that, we created a similar video featuring six senior leaders from offices in the Asia region, and I was very proud to be a part of that project. It was very impactful and helped to open the conversation around mental health.

What has been the impact of the videos?

The videos have gone a long way towards changing attitudes and perceptions around mental health.

By having people in senior leadership positions share their personal stories, it normalises these experiences and demonstrates that it is possible to excel in one's career even if one experiences mental ill health.

The video illustrates how the firm can support employees through difficult times by providing time off and workplace adjustments. The colleagues who shared their stories have naturally become workplace mental health champions, which has helped to open conversations about mental health in the office.

The videos have been our biggest success to date and have helped to build support and momentum for other mental health initiatives.

How did you find employees who were willing to share their stories?

Our Head of Human Resources Asia at the time was a long-time employee of Linklaters and was very passionate about workplace mental health. He had developed strong working relationships with employees in the region, so he knew who may be open to sharing their stories.

Without those pre-existing relationships, it would have been much more difficult to get people to

volunteer to participate. Once a few senior leaders joined the project, other local leaders felt more comfortable to get behind the cause and share their stories as well.

What other mental health initiatives are you working on?

Last year we completed a review of all our policies across Asia to ensure they incorporate mental health and we have focused on having clear and standard processes in our Asia offices for cases of mental ill-health.

We have created a portal on our intranet to house all our mental health resources and contacts, which has made it easier to signpost employees to help and support.

We are continuing to work on mental wellness and mental health awareness, including through training. Finally, we have also launched a free on-site psychology service.



Can you tell us more about your free on-site psychology service?

We piloted a free on-site psychology service in Singapore and it was very well received. With the disruption last year adding to people's stress and anxiety, we felt it was the right time to implement a similar programme in Hong Kong.

Our first step was to find the right psychologist. We met with many and ultimately chose one that had the right flexibility and pricing, who also had experience with the mindset of lawyers (her husband is a lawyer) and shared our vision of helping our people to thrive.

In terms of logistics, she is on-site four days a month (we initially started with two days a month, but increased this during the pandemic). People contact her directly to make an appointment and we have a very private room tucked away in the office, in which she can see people. When we have been working from home, she has been conducting virtual appointments.

We place an annual cap on the number of sessions available to people, but if she feels people would benefit from more, we have made arrangements for them to continue covered by medical insurance.

She provides us with monthly, anonymized stats, but otherwise the service is completely confidential. In addition, recently we have been running a monthly healthy minds webinar series, which she has designed (based on the themes she is seeing in

her consultations) and delivered for us. We still direct people to our EAP service, particularly those who wish to speak in Cantonese. However, we do feel that having an on-site psychologist has helped to open up conversations about mental health and create a more supportive culture in our office more than ever before.

What is your key advice for other organisations who want to prioritise mental health?

Get senior management buy-in. Most senior leaders these days are already aware that workforces in Hong Kong and Asia are under a lot of pressure.

Have conversations with them about the benefits of taking a proactive approach to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of employees. Once they recognise that change is needed, it is easy to get high-level support for mental health initiatives.

