



SEAFARERS HOSPITAL SOCIETY



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SEAFARERS ARE ESSENTIAL TO INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND THE GLOBAL ECONOMY, YET THEIR HEALTH AND WELLBEING IS OFTEN OVERLOOKED AND UNDERVALUED. IN RESPONSE TO THIS, THE SEAFARERS HOSPITAL SOCIETY (SHS), A CHARITY BASED IN LONDON, HAS PRODUCED; **'SEAFARERS' HEALTH: ON COURSE FOR A CULTURE OF CARE'**, A REPORT HIGHLIGHTING THE NEED FOR AN INCREASED FOCUS ON THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF SEAFARERS.

THE REPORT IDENTIFIES THREE KEY HEALTH AND WELLBEING AREAS THE MARITIME INDUSTRY NEED TO FOCUS ON:

1

KNOWLEDGE GAP

There is a huge lack of knowledge surrounding seafarer health, both on board vessels and ashore. This includes areas such as nutrition, hygiene, mental health, medical standards and occupational health.

2

LACK OF LEGISLATIVE PROVISION

Despite a number of international agreements concerning maritime safety and welfare, a lack of effective legislation means that seafarers are susceptible to exploitation, leading to poor mental and physical health.

3

LACK OF INVESTMENT IN HEALTH AND SAFETY

Given the competitive nature of the industry, minimal emphasis is placed on investing in employee welfare, which consequently leaves seafarers exposed and vulnerable.

In light of the report's findings, various initiatives have been proposed to help improve the health and welfare of seafarers both on board vessels and ashore. These could also lead to greater job satisfaction, improved recruitment and retention rates and help reduce the number of incidents on board. The maritime industry could then attract and retain top talent, reducing the staff turnover rate and the cost of training new employees.

WHAT CAN SHIPOWNERS DO TO IMPROVE CREW WELFARE ON BOARD:

- Implement a comprehensive system of health and safety regulations to ensure seafarers are protected from exploitation and are better supported in terms of their physical and mental health
- Introduce measures such as mental health first aid to improve wellbeing
- Ensure that precautions are in place to combat fatigue, such as limiting overtime and sea-time as well as providing high quality accommodation for crewmembers
- Use key performance indicators (KPIs) such as the number of reported injuries, rates of illness, access to healthcare services and overall crew satisfaction surveys to measure the effectiveness of crew welfare initiatives and programs
- Set up disease prevention initiatives for issues such as dental health, diabetes, high blood pressure and cancers
- Create a clear and effective complaints procedure that allows crew members to report bullying, harassment, workplace violence and sexual abuse. Additionally, establish a confidential whistleblowing policy to encourage individuals to report any misconduct without fear of retaliation
- Provide sufficient access to healthcare on board vessels and shore-side medical services
- Create systems to support seafarers' families, such as family welfare programs and improved communication links with the vessel by providing internet access on board

SEAFARERS HOSPITAL SOCIETY
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International Requirements for Seafarers' Health



Key Performance Indicators

- Frequency and nature of injuries on board leading to loss of more than three full working days.
- Frequency and nature of illness on board leading to loss of more than three full working days.
- Frequency of contact with maritime telemedical assistance services and outcomes.
- Frequency of medical evacuations and deaths on board with causes.
- Frequency of referrals for medical and dental advice in port with reasons.
- Frequency of repatriations for medical reasons.
- Frequency of termination of employment for medical reasons.

Our KPIs in this section are based upon key factors that are laid out in the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC 2006), the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW), guidelines by the ILO and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Safety Management Code (ISM) which includes the Safety Management System (SMS).

Organisations would need to assess impact on:

- The management of health and safety risks on board (SMS and MLC).
- Seafarer medical fitness assessments (ILO/IMO Guidelines).
- Arrangements for the management of medical emergencies at sea per the MLC/STCW covering medical care training, medical facilities and equipment, as well as communications with telemedical maritime assistance services (TMAS).
- Medical and dental referral in port (MLC).
- Medical repatriation and rehabilitation (MLC).



By using Key Performance Indicator's (KPI) it is possible to establish a benchmark for how seafarer health and wellbeing is monitored and this can provide evidence for companies, seafarers and their representatives, maritime trade unions, trustees, governments and the public alike. Through this data and measurable results, we can identify which interventions are the most effective for quick and cost-effective gains. The SHS report also emphasises the importance of promoting a culture of care for all stakeholders within the maritime industry. This includes flag states, shipowners, crewing agencies, local port authorities, insurers and healthcare providers. This approach is vital in order to ensure that seafarers are provided with sufficient protection against exploitation as well as improved support regarding their physical and mental health.

SEAFARERS HOSPITAL SOCIETY
SEAFARERS' HEALTH: ON COURSE FOR A CULTURE OF CARE

Psychological Wellbeing



Key Performance Indicators

- Benchmarks that can be inputted on the basis of current provisions for each of these aspects, with records of steps taken to improve quality.
- Confidential surveys of crew views on quality of life at sea and exit interviews with seafarers who are leaving to assess potential organisational shortcomings.
- Monitoring and investigations of complaints about conditions on board for recognised shortcomings.
- Developing and implementing either an Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP) and/or Crisis Intervention Procedure (CIP) to confidentially support crew.
- Developing and implementing fatigue reduction programmes.
- Improving communication by ensuring all crew have a high level of fluency in the working language of the vessel, and by improving the communication and leadership skills of those in higher positions onboard/ on shore.
- Ensuring that crew have access to reliable internet connections so as to communicate with their loved ones at home.
- Promoting social activities in port consistent with the culture of crew, which can be carried out by masters and senior officers.
- Creating a clear and effective complaint procedure and confidential whistleblowing policy and procedure for reporting of bullying, harassment, workplace violence and sexual abuse.

There are numerous factors that may contribute to a seafarer's psychological wellbeing, including their personal mental health, personality, home circumstances and working/living conditions while at sea.

Organisations would need to assess impact on their ability to offer:

- Security of employment, with safe working conditions.
- Reliable payment of fair wages, both to seafarer and as remittance to home.
- Short cycles of sea time and leave (less than nine months).
- Skilled crew management, with prevention of harassment and recognition of good work.
- Lack of language barriers on board.
- Training of crew in mutual support.
- Minimisation of fatigue by limitation of overtime.
- Good crew mess facilities and accommodation.
- Open access to communication with home, family and friends.
- Family liaison points within the company.
- Access to external advisory and support services (which may be anonymous).
- Facilities and time for safe socialising when in port.



This report serves as a significant reminder of the crucial role seafarers play in society, highlighting the need for the sector to prioritise their health and wellbeing. It is evident that greater efforts are required to ensure that individuals can work safely at sea without sacrificing their welfare. By adopting the recommendations presented in the report, we hope that we can create an improved industry-wide culture of care that prioritises the protection of seafarers.

The full report can be accessed here.
<https://bit.ly/shs-report>