



26th September 2014

The Chairman
WA Parliament Education & Health Standing Committee
Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
Perth
WA 6000

Dear Chairman,

Re: Mental Health of FIFO workers.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this important and emotive topic.

At this time MercyCare does not have a specific program dedicated solely to FIFO workers, but does have several programs within the Family & Community Services Directorate who work with FIFO individuals or FIFO families.

It is with this in mind that I felt compelled to write these observations and considerations relevant to this area. (I am sure that you may be aware of several of these so hope that this gives further evidence to the implementation of initiatives to prevent further suicides, FIFO worker isolation and FIFO family breakdown).

1. Problems with Drug & Alcohol misuse for FIFO workers (link to excessive use in young men returning to Perth, and using it to cope with social isolation whilst away).
2. Isolation and family breakdown which impacts directly on children, parenting and family units we work with. This can be seen within the work in our Reconnect program.
3. The alarming emergence of FIFO parents (both or single female parents) leaving teenagers alone at home whilst going to site (aged 14 plus leaving alone or with grandparents).
4. Link to Depression, anxiety, self harming and aforementioned increased D&A use.
5. Breakdown in family and relationship problems (both adult to adult & adult to child) - specifically in Reconnect program with evidence of an ineffective 'good cop, bad cop' parental style.

It is with these themes above that some recommendations could be suggested;

6. Whole family counselling session within first 8 weeks of roster (potentially included in employee benefits scheme), with regular sessions (once a quarter) thereafter. Specific work on resilience and positive communication within the family. Consideration whether this should be mandatory for employees provided by employers on their first or second rotation back at home.



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7. Tier 2 Medicare sessions available for workers when back in Perth or home (GP fast tracked), with secure landline phone opportunities whilst on site for follow up. An extension of amount of sessions available and funded by employer.

8. Opportunities for relationship/marriage counselling sessions (once a quarter minimum with opportunity for more) offered by employer as part of working conditions.

9. Better antenna / signal for technology (for mobiles & computers) in several areas of a site including opportunities to SKYPE.

10. Free landline minutes in sound proof booths for FIFO workers to call home. This would need to be in quiet area on camp (away from hustle and bustle of work area or licensed premise). Consideration for employers to have this as a paid hour per week minimum.

I am happy to discuss any of the above in more detail or provide anonymised vignettes for your perusal regarding the work relevant in this area and the emerging themes. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly on the details below.

Kind Regards

Helen Robinson

Manager Mental Health, Homelessness and Youth Services