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WORKPLACE CHALLENGE

Initiative to help workers detect mental health issues

KUALA LUMPUR: Employees will soon be able to stage an intervention for their colleagues facing mental health issues through the newly launched Occupational Mental First Aid initiative under the Human Resources Ministry.

Minister Steven Sim said mental health was among the main challenges at the workplace.

“There is still a stigma on mental health. This initiative will help enhance public awareness, particularly among employers and employees. It’s okay to seek help,” he said at the 24th Occupational Safety and Health Conference and Exhibition at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre.

Themed “The Future of Work”, the conference aimed to help some 1,200 participants from various sectors understand future safety and health challenges at the workplace and preparing them to respond.

Earlier in his speech, Sim said the World Health Organisation expected mental health illness to replace cardiovascular disease as the main factor to determine whether a person is deemed fit to work.

Unfortunately, only one psychosocial case was reported in the 2022 National Occupational Accident and Disease statistics report

due to lack of awareness about the signs and solutions, he said.

He said this was in contrast to reports on physical health issues, such as hearing problems (5,478 cases), muscular-skeletal issues (678), infections (420), physical injuries (339) and poisoning (185).

He said RM12 million would be allocated to train about 10,000 psychological first-aiders, including those in the public sector, under the programme.

This initiative would benefit employers as it would improve productivity and staff performance, as well as address absenteeism, Sim said.

Participants would be taught how to detect early signs of psychological stress among their colleagues and the steps that can be taken to help them.

The training can improve communication skills, as well as identify the right channels where individuals facing mental health issues can go to for help.

The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health has previously introduced the Employee Assistance Programme aimed at identifying and addressing employees’ mental health problems early so that their work performance is not affected.

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