



**Chief Executives Board
for Coordination**

CEB/2008/HLCM/HR/29

6 June 2008

Meeting of CEB HR Network16th Session

UNICEF, New York, 8-10 July 2008

Agenda item III.D (c)

Relationships between Staff/Stress Counsellors and the CEB HR Network*Note by IAEA***Background**

1. At the spring meeting of the CEB HR Network, a paper was considered that proposed the establishment of a relationship between the “Group Staff and Stress Counsellors of UN and Affiliated Agencies” (SSC) and the HR Network. It was noted that the SSC represented a large number of counsellors from across the UN family, and that it had been meeting informally for several years on matters of professional interest to counsellors and of importance to the respective UN organisations.
2. While there was considerable support in the HR Network for the formation of this relationship, a report was provided from the Department of Safety and Security (DSS), which outlining certain concerns. The Director of Human Resources, IAEA, was requested to consult further on the proposal, with a view to reconciling any differences of opinion on the matter. The following observations are supported by DSS.

Key Issues

3. Both the DSS and the HR Network recognise that members of the SSC provide important services in support of the responsibilities of DSS and HR Network colleagues, and that there should be formal means for the SSC to report to the HR Network and to make recommendations on matters of interest to the CEB, through the HLCM. It is recognised by both the DSS and the HR Network that SSC members provide services in support of both preventative stress management including counselling and critical incident stress management (of interest to DSS and HR Network members) and staff welfare, including substance abuse, personal counselling, day to day stress counselling, harassment processes and many other areas of support (of interest to HR Network and Medical Services Network members).
4. Accordingly, DSS supports the establishment of a relationship between the SSC and the HR Network, so that the SSC and HR Network may address matters that are of mutual interest (including matters related to staff welfare in the broadest sense).
5. Similarly, the SSC should have an active relationship with the DSS in relation to critical incident stress management matters.
6. DSS has initiated a review of its critical incident stress management operations. A meeting with five agencies and DSS concluded on 16 May 2008 that there are several issues that require further discussion to establish specific protocols and mechanisms for improving: communication; coordination in a crisis;

coordination of training; roles and responsibilities; the need for a strategic framework; and information sharing. A meeting will be convened in October 2008 of the Critical Incident Stress Management Working Group to consider these matters. There will be matters of interest to the HR Network that will be addressed in this working group, as many HR Network members each have stress and critical incident stress management responsibilities for their respective organisations.

Recommendation

7. As both the DSS and HR Network are supportive of a formalisation of the relationship between the SSC and HR Network, it is recommended that the SSC and HR Network jointly draft a Terms of Reference (TOR) to govern this relationship.
8. Both the DSS and HR Network have noted that there should be certain conditions in the TOR, including: that the SSC should review its meeting procedures, minute taking, and reporting protocols, as well as the election/appointment of its (Co-)Chair, to accord with the practices of the CEB; that the SSC should report to the HR Network on matters related to the welfare of staff; that the SSC and DSS should work jointly on critical incident stress matters; that the SSC should ensure that all of its reports with recommendations are provided to the CEB through the HR Network and HLCM; and that each of the SSC, HR Network, and DSS should ensure that there is sufficient bi-lateral and tri-lateral dialogue to ensure that the role of the SSC is as effective as possible in the interests of the UN system and its constituent organisations.
9. Finally, the name of the SSC should be reviewed by the members of the current SSC. The term "Network" should be reserved to those reporting directly to the HLCM. The term "Working Group" suggests an entity that has a specific task with a fixed duration. An alternative term may be "Staff and Stress Counsellors Special Interest Group", which may be referred to as the "SSC".
10. A background document prepared in consultation between the SSC and the CEB Secretariat is attached as Annex 1. It provides useful guidance that will assist in establishing the Terms of Reference of the relationship between SSC and the HR Network.

Annex 1

Formalization of the Network of UN System Staff / Stress Counsellors

1. Many UN System Agencies have created the posts of Staff Counsellor, Stress Counsellor or Staff Well-Being Officer, who report directly or indirectly to their respective senior managers in Human Resources.
2. The work of these counsellors focuses on psychosocial health & well-being and the welfare of staff, and on promoting positive work environments. While the specific responsibilities of counsellors varies by organization, the broad range of Staff / Stress Counsellor activities encompasses:
 - individual consultations and counselling on work-related and personal issues, and for mental health & substance abuse problems that may affect work;
 - providing support, guidance and assistance on staff welfare issues;
 - consulting to managers and HR on workplace issues such as positive and healthy work environments, team building, and on how to assist staff with stress problems that affect their functioning at work; team assessment and team building;
 - organizational consulting to managers on issues such as downsizing, managing change and improving communication;
 - extensive mission travel to support and consult with staff and managers in the field on coping with the stresses of high demand and high risk work; this includes providing and ensuring psychosocial support following emergencies and disasters;
 - coordinating with Medical Services to assure staff receive appropriate health care or to support temporary work accommodations when mental health is at issue;
 - maintaining confidentiality as a fundamental counselling value and an important protection for staff and manager clients;
 - participation in working groups on agency-specific topics such as crisis preparedness, benefits, disability, and conflict resolution;
 - contributing to development of agency policies and practices to support psychosocial well-being of staff and positive management practices.
3. There are many shared concerns on stress and staff welfare issues among counsellors and across UN system agencies. This led to the formation of the Counsellor Network seven years ago. The collective knowledge and experience of the Staff / Stress Counsellors has benefited members of the Network directly in their clinical & consultative work with clients. The Network also pulls together diverse organizational perspectives on the fact that meeting the human needs of staff (i.e. minimizing the stress risks and maximizing staff well-being) also supports the business needs of the organizations.

4. Through the UN Counsellor Network, the Staff/Stress counsellors are also collaborating with the UN Medical Directors Group to identify areas of common interest, practice and coordination for promoting the psychosocial health and well-being of staff, within agencies and across the UN system. The UN Medical Directors Group has endorsed the formalization of the Counsellor Network at its recent meeting in March, 2008.
5. Members of the Counsellor Network have taken best practice examples and lessons learned back to their own agencies and advocated for consistent approaches. However, the interests of UN System staff could be better served by the Network having a more formal voice in the UN System in order to bring to the attention of policy and decision makers, in a more systematic and strategic way, its unique perspective on psychosocial well-being and staff welfare.

Recommendation

6. The UN Counsellor Network proposes that a formal Terms of Reference be drafted to establish the relationship between the Counsellor Network and the HR Network.

Relation of the SCSC (Counsellor Network) to the Critical Incident Stress Management Unit (CISMU) of the UN's Department of Security Services

7. UN System Agencies provide funding to support UNDSS, and this includes the Counselling services of CISMU, mandated primarily to coordinate crisis response by UN system counsellors and ensure counselling support for UN System staff following major critical incidents. They also provide crisis stress counselling directly. CISMU is also expected, along with the UN agencies, to ensure that preventive stress management training is provided for UN staff.
8. As CISMU is part of DSS, their services are in the interests of supporting the staff of all UN System agencies, within the purview of DSS. The agency counsellors, individually and as members of the UN Counsellor Network, strongly value the specialized and highly skilled crisis services provided by CISMU. There is a valuable and essential resource utilized by all UN system agencies exposed to large scale critical incidents impacting their staff in the field. This is particularly important in an environment that has historically been thinly resourced with counselling services.
9. It is within the functions and mandates of Staff/Stress counsellors in the various UN agencies to work in a much broader way to meet the needs of staff and promote staff well-being and welfare. As a regular part of their work, the agency Staff/Stress counsellors interact with and pursue collaborative efforts with other bodies/functions within their own agencies, such as Human Resources management, benefits, policy and training, Medical Services, Ombudsmen and other conflict resolution offices, Security, and others. The Counsellor Network encourages sharing of best practices from the collective experience of its members.