

# Work Related Stress on the Rise

By Phillip Baldwin

A recent report estimates that nearly 10% of the UK's gross national product (GNP) is lost each year due to work-related stress<sup>1</sup> and figures show that almost 13 million working days were lost to stress, depression and anxiety in 2003/04 . Counseling experience shows that stress and trauma can trigger underlying mental health issues that may impact upon an employees' well-being and performance at work. What are employers doing to address this brain and profit drain?

Two leading organizations, Life Works, the mental health and addiction treatment group, and SHL, the world leader in objective assessment, are to host a conference, treating the Impaired Professional, to assist employers with the identification and management of work-related stress and professional derailment.

Professional derailment refers to the under-performance of senior professionals in industry as a result of mental health issues triggered by work-related stress, such as depression, compulsive behaviour and addiction.

"Treating the Impaired Professional" takes place on 15.09.05 and features a line-up of leading experts on mental health counseling and treatment, drug and alcohol policy, objective assessment and employment and disability law.

Steven Lanzet, Life Works' clinical director, comments, "Less than 10% of companies have a policy to tackle stress, yet the pressures and demands of 21st century industry are intense. Alcohol and drug addiction has emerged as a significant problem for 10-15% of those in upper management and at the executive level of organisations<sup>3</sup>."

He continues, "Addictive disorders are among the most prevalent, costly and least intervened problems in the workplace today<sup>4</sup>. The aim of the conference is to encourage industry to sit down and think about the policies they have in place to help their top level employees who may be facing high levels of pressure and stress and could be on the road to derailment."

Companies invest a huge amount of money in recruiting and training senior professionals. However, without effective procedures to identify and treat those who may be facing derailment, employers are unlikely to obtain a satisfactory return on investment. Steven comments, "The good news is that burnt-out professionals respond well to intervention and treatment. The key is identifying an individual facing derailment early on."

SHL's experience highlights how a combination of personality characteristics may suggest potential difficulty and derailment. Eugene Burke, a leading occupational psychologist at SHL comments, "The use of personality assessments in industry is already well established, but these usually focus on the 'bright-side' aspects of an individual's personality - those things that can be used to predict success in a role. However, this same data could provide useful insights into what could be termed the 'dark-side' - things that may work against the success and cause problems for the individual and the organization. These derailment factors could, if not managed, prevent individuals from fulfilling their potential."

He concludes, "Employers need to consider developing personalized coping strategies with their employees that limit the impact of "dark-side" aspects of personality and maximize the benefits of bright-side aspects. In the long-term, this will be beneficial for all involved."