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## PRESS RELEASE

**For immediate release: Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> June 2016**

### **Seafarers Hospital Society launches free online mental health and wellbeing service**

The Seafarers Hospital Society has joined forces with Big White Wall to fund a new online mental health and wellbeing service for serving merchant seafarers. Launched on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2016, the new service is open to all UK-based merchant navy personnel. It's free, safe, supportive and anonymous, and is available 24/7 via an online portal. It includes information, self-help resources, a supportive community, and one-to-one help from trained counsellors.

Launching the new service, Peter Coulson, SHS Secretary said:

*"We talk openly about some of the physical challenges of working at sea but mental health and wellbeing is a topic we find harder to discuss. One in four people experience a mental health problem in their lifetime and seafarers are no different – in fact they are probably under more pressure than most. Whether it's general stress and anxiety, or feelings of depression, it can be hard to know what to do and difficult to know who to talk to. We recognise that and we want to do something about it, which is why we're funding this new service in partnership with Big White Wall."*

Big White Wall is an anonymous online support service where merchant navy officers and ratings can access information and tools, talk to like-minded people and seek advice from professionals about things that are worrying them. Help is available on a wide range of issues, whether it's coping with stress, reducing alcohol intake or dealing with depression – BWW gives men and women in the merchant navy a chance to talk about what's worrying them.

Big White Wall works across many different sectors, providing services to the NHS, Armed Forces, universities and many employers. 70% of users report improved wellbeing, including reduced isolation, with almost half sharing something for the first time. One commented, "Big White Wall's community is wonderful. Everyone is so supportive. It helps to know that others are going through similar things."

Tina Trenkler, UK President at Big White Wall, said:

*“We offer free support to the Armed Forces so we understand the sorts of pressures that merchant seafarers will be faced with, and we know how difficult it can be to get help or even just to talk about some of these issues. We offer a unique combination of services from online information and courses, to peer support and one-to-one counselling. And we cover a wide range of issues, from managing anxiety and depression to quitting smoking or healthy eating. So whatever the problem you’re struggling with Big White Wall can help. Access is easy and it really does work.”*

Access to the new service is via the SHS website ([www.seahospital.org.uk/mental-health-and-wellbeing/](http://www.seahospital.org.uk/mental-health-and-wellbeing/)). Users will be asked to complete a short questionnaire to confirm their eligibility and will then be directed to the Big White Wall site. This process is entirely anonymous.

## **Ends**

For further information contact Peter Coulson on 020 8858 3696.

## **Notes to editors**

- The Seafarers Hospital Society is a charity that has been caring for the health and welfare of seafarers since 1821.
- For more information about SHS go to [www.seahospital.org.uk](http://www.seahospital.org.uk)
- The Society’s Annual Meeting takes place at 12 noon on Friday 10<sup>th</sup> June 2016 at Trinity House, Tower Hill, London EC3N 4DH. Guest speaker, Sarah O’Donnell, Business Development Manager at BWW, will be speaking to delegates about the new service for merchant seafarers.
- Big White Wall is an anonymous online community of people who are experiencing common mental health and wellbeing problems such as feeling down, depressed, anxious or stressed. Trained counsellors are on hand at all times to moderate and facilitate the service. Big White Wall is registered with the Care Quality Commission.
- Big White Wall has reached over 40,000 people to date and is commissioned to reach thousands more. It was founded in 2007, and now operates in areas across the UK, as well as in the US and New Zealand.
- For more information, go to [www.bigwhitewall.com](http://www.bigwhitewall.com).