



Seafarers' Health: On Course for a Culture of Care



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Foreword



Resilience is a much lauded mainstay of the maritime industry. This resilience is evident not only from the last few years during which seafarers have gone above and beyond to keep the supply chain functioning despite COVID-19 and geopolitical conflict, but also in withstanding what are often tough and challenging operating conditions of their everyday jobs.

However, praising the resilience of crews can hide systemic industry issues, from excessive work hours to poor living conditions on board. Too often we overlook the health and welfare impacts that this so-called resilience inflicts on our seafarers.

If we are to thrive as an industry, it is time to reassess and improve our culture of care for seafarers. It is not only a moral duty, but it affects the bottom line.

Maritime and offshore industries are under greater scrutiny than ever, whether seeking support from governments to become greener or facing growing public awareness on the emissions and ethics of how their goods reach them.

The same applies for the businesses we work with. The need to evidence strong environmental, social and governance practices (ESG) means companies will increasingly only do business with organisations that align with the values of their customers.

If we are to retain a skilled workforce and attract new talent, we must look at improving working conditions and addressing the concerns of seafarers.

This is particularly urgent for an industry already facing a skills shortage, and one that is likely to

be made worse by seafarers deciding not to return to life at sea after the conditions endured during COVID-19.

In a world that offers young talent exciting careers ashore, we need to work harder to be an attractive sector, particularly when competing for digital and green skills. Placing wellbeing high on a company's agenda, and providing work that aligns with younger generations' desire to improve the world, are often seen as more important than wage alone.

Shipping has an opportunity to shake off old perceptions as it aims for a just transition to a zero emission industry, striving to improve working conditions and provide greater opportunities for people from all backgrounds around the world.

While it is clear that maritime sector has made great strides over the past decade, there is a great deal of work still to do. It is vital that we ensure greater diversity, that we nurture talent, and that we create holistic and healthy environments in which people can thrive.

We need to move from merely relying on the resilience of our people to promoting a wider culture of care. Doing so will benefit us all. I hope you will join us at the Seafarers Hospital Society in making this possible.

Sandra Welch
Sandra Welch
CEO
Seafarers Hospital Society



Introduction

The Seafarers Hospital Society proposes this discussion paper as part of our strategy to enable clear, measurable, pragmatic changes to create a culture of care in shipping. The feedback we gather from seafarers will aid in offering tangible changes that ship owners and operators seeking to improve the physical and psychological health of staff working onboard their vessels can incorporate into their existing systems.

While numerous studies have been undertaken to improve life and work at sea, few of the resulting recommendations have been put into effect. Our landmark study, conducted with the Yale University Maritime Research Center, used two sets of roundtables with several industry stakeholders such as ship owners, ship operators, charterers, unions, P&I clubs and more to examine the gap between existing recommendations and their implementation:
<https://seahospital.org.uk/culture-of-care-is-key-to-future-seafarer-health-and-welfare-says-seafarers-hospital-society/>.

The literature review and roundtables established a core set of common health and wellbeing issues and the actions to resolve them; tangible, strategic interventions that are minimally disruptive and cost effective while having a marked effect on seafarer health and welfare. These have been translated into key performance indicators (KPIs) which can be utilised by maritime organisations to monitor the effectiveness of interventions intended to improve morale, life and work at sea.

Improved seafarer wellbeing will not be the only benefit as maritime companies implement these KPIs and associated changes. Greater wellbeing and job satisfaction are linked to increased recruitment and retention rates. This will ensure that the maritime industry not only attracts the talented and cutting-edge labour we need to transform our industry, but also retains vital industry knowledge. The latter will reduce the high cost of training new employees and improve safety, as vessels operated by well-trained and

The KPIs are based around the following key factors:



Fully meeting international requirements for securing seafarer health and maritime safety.



Actively supporting health promotion activities for seafarers.



Ensuring that conditions for seafarers minimise psychological distress and ill-health.

informed crew have a lower probability of accidents and injuries.

These KPIs establish a baseline for measuring how seafarer health and wellbeing is functioning, providing evidence for the companies that implement the changes and for other stakeholders including seafarers and their representatives, maritime trade unions, trustees, governments and the general public. Actionable data and measurable outcomes will also assist in demonstrating which interventions offer greatest, most immediate and most cost-effective gains.

The KPIs focus on creating a holistic culture of care based on the International Labor Organisation's (ILO) definition of decent work. This culture will encompass not only seafarers, but also the organisation itself, the environment and society.

A paradigm shift to a culture of care needs long-term investment. The pay-offs will be a significant improvement in the lives of seafarers and their families and, for companies, lower operating costs and better retention and recruitment - a win-win opportunity for the maritime industry.

International Requirements for Seafarers' Health



Key Performance Indicators



Frequency and nature of injuries on board leading to loss of more than three full working days.



Frequency and nature of illness on board leading to loss of more than three full working days.



Frequency of contact with maritime telemedical assistance services and outcomes.



Frequency of medical evacuations and deaths on board with causes.



Frequency of referrals for medical and dental advice in port with reasons.



Frequency of repatriations for medical reasons.



Frequency of termination of employment for medical reasons.

Our KPIs in this section are based upon key factors that are laid out in the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC 2006), the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW), guidelines by the ILO and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Safety Management Code (ISM) which includes the Safety Management System (SMS).

Organisations would need to assess impact on:

- The management of health and safety risks on board (SMS and MLC).
- Seafarer medical fitness assessments (ILO/ IMO Guidelines).
- Arrangements for the management of medical emergencies at sea per the MLC/ STCW covering medical care training, medical facilities and equipment, as well as communications with telemedical maritime assistance services (TMAS).
- Medical and dental referral in port (MLC).
- Medical repatriation and rehabilitation (MLC).





The scope of interventions in this section are likely to vary depending on the nature of maritime operations involved. The organisation’s aim should be to provide their employees with opportunities to enhance overall physical health and wellbeing, extending the length of the seafarer’s working life and minimising injuries. In order to be effective, there ideally should be some carry over from onboard activities to provisions for time while shore-side, whether in port or on leave.

Organisations would need to assess impact on their ability to offer:

- Education for seafarers about what can be done to prevent occupational injuries and ill-health.
- Information and advice from enhanced seafarer medical examinations, which must be delivered solely for the benefit of the seafarer and not form the basis for discriminatory actions relating to employment.
- Possibilities for physical fitness and mobility, such as facilities, individual recommendations, targets and competitions.
- Appropriate and acceptable nutritious food choices, general and individual advice on healthy weights, access to weighing facilities, and targets and competitions on weight management.
- Targeted disease prevention, such as dental health, diabetes, high blood pressure, cancers, etc.
- Reduction of communicable diseases such as respiratory diseases like influenza, COVID-19, infectious gastrointestinal illness, and sexually transmitted diseases.

Health Promotion Activities



Key Performance Indicators



Measurable inputs such as increased healthy food options, exercise facilities, educational activities.



Measured uptake of health and wellbeing programmes assessing the numbers/ proportions of participating



Provision of support while ashore through seafarer access to performance data and personalised advice.



Measurable outcomes such as Body Mass Index (BMI) control or exercise increase.



Improved reporting of communicable diseases (without stigma) and reducing underreporting and misclassification of communicable diseases.



Implementation of preventative measures such as vaccination of crew, allocation of seafarers in single cabins where possible, early treatment, and isolation of respiratory diseases to reduce and contain outbreaks.



Institution of regular awareness-raising campaigns for the prevention of common respiratory infections, such as seasonal influenza, emerging diseases and other respiratory diseases.



Education about risk, such as awareness campaigns for cancers. More detailed information on how best to develop health promotion activities may be obtained from a range of organisations such as SHS, ISWAN, maritime health advisers or P&I clubs.

Psychological Wellbeing



Key Performance Indicators



Benchmarks that can be inputted on the basis of current provisions for each of these aspects, with records of steps taken to improve quality.



Confidential surveys of crew views on quality of life at sea and exit interviews with seafarers who are leaving to assess potential organisational shortcomings.



Monitoring and investigations of complaints about conditions on board for recognised shortcomings.



Developing and implementing either an Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP) and/ or Crisis Intervention Procedure (CIP) to confidentially support crew.



Developing and implementing fatigue reduction programmes.



Improving communication by ensuring all crew have a high level of fluency in the working language of the vessel, and by improving the communication and leadership skills of those in higher positions onboard/ on shore.



Ensuring that crew have access to reliable internet connections so as to communicate with their loved ones at home.



Promoting social activities in port consistent with the culture of crew, which can be carried out by masters and senior officers.



Creating a clear and effective complaint procedure and confidential whistleblowing policy and procedure for reporting of bullying, harassment, workplace violence and sexual abuse.

There are numerous factors that may contribute to a seafarer's psychological wellbeing, including their personal mental health, personality, home circumstances and working/living conditions while at sea.

Organisations would need to assess impact on their ability to offer:

- Security of employment, with safe working conditions.
- Reliable payment of fair wages, both to seafarer and as remittance to home.
- Short cycles of sea-time and leave (less than nine months).
- Skilled crew management, with prevention of harassment and recognition of good work.
- Lack of language barriers on board.
- Training of crew in mutual support.
- Minimisation of fatigue by limitation of overtime.
- Good crew mess facilities and accommodation.
- Open access to communication with home, family and friends.
- Family liaison points within the company.
- Access to external advisory and support services (which may be anonymous).
- Facilities and time for safe socialising when in port.



Conclusion

While companies further along their journey towards a culture of care may find themselves already scoring highly on these KPIs, others will just be at the beginning. Similarly, these interventions are merely a starting point from which industry stakeholders can begin to assess their long-term investments in seafarer health and welfare.

For those who find themselves at the beginning and undertaking only a few of these recommendations, the information gathered will be valuable evidence of the impact of these interventions over time. Even starting the process will make marked improvements on seafarer wellbeing.

The Seafarers Hospital Society has a wide range of freely available resources - such as our seafarer health webinar series - intended to support these interventions: <https://seahospital.org.uk/seafarers-hospital-society-launches-webinar-series/>. Collaboration, sharing best practice and knowledge is essential

in empowering the maritime industry to create a culture of care. This report is one of many resources dedicated to this undertaking.

We value seafarer input and would welcome interested parties who might participate in any/ all of the following:

1. Attend a webinar on the findings of the report
2. Complete a short survey
3. Participate in round table discussions

Register your interest here:
<https://seahospital.org.uk/engage-with-us-on-our-current-research/>

We are united in our end goal of a competitive industry that is diverse, supportive, and invested in our people. Working together, we can achieve a sustainable industry committed to a culture of care - one step at a time.





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