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Stressed teachers offered electric shock therapy to combat anxiety and depression



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Stressed teachers at a chain of academies are being offered electric shock therapy to combat anxiety and depression.

Already used by the British Army and US military to treat post traumatic stress the gadget works by

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stimulating the brain with a mild shock.

Now it is being used in primary and secondary schools to help teachers cope with what is recognised as a nationwide problem.

School bosses have successfully tested the device and are now offering the treatment at seven secondary schools, seven primary schools and a special educational needs school in Kent.

After running a pilot scheme, the Leigh Academies Trust say the device has had a positive impact on levels of anxiety, depression and sleep disorder - all symptoms of stress among its staff.

Trust HR director Richard Taylor said the devices are now being made available to all the Trust's teachers to augment existing strategies to deal with stress.

He said: “The results from these trials were extremely encouraging and we saw a positive impact on the quality of life scores for nearly all those using the device.

“In light of the results, we are now rolling the scheme out so that it is available to all staff in the Trust.

“Whilst this is not the sole solution to improve teacher wellbeing it is a fantastic tool to help staff maintain positive mental health.

“Leigh Academies Trust believes that teacher wellbeing is one of the most important issues currently in education and, as a result, we have been exploring ways to help teachers maintain positive mental health including mindfulness sessions and examining the workload of staff.”

The Alpha-Stim device is the size of a mobile phone and sends micro-currents of electricity to increase a patient's naturally occurring "alpha

waves" that are said to create a more relaxed state of mind.

The drug-free treatment, which takes around 20 minutes a day, involves two electrodes being clipped to the earlobes with wires running to the machine, giving the impression the patient is simply wearing headphones.

The hands-free device delivers a tiny, painless electrical current, measuring less than one milliamperere, to the brain.

It is believed to have a therapeutic effect that can also help insomniacs.

Chinese teach...

The Trust's educational psychologist Jo Buttle, added: "The Trust's

dynamic and forward thinking approach enabled us to adopt a creative strategy in helping reduce the symptoms of anxiety, depression and sleep difficulties amongst staff.

“The results are excellent and suggest this is something schools and academies should consider as part of their staff support strategy.”

The National Union of Teachers has warned that 90 per cent of staff consider quitting because of workload and stress with teaching among the top three most stressful occupations.

And a recent study by the National Foundation for Educational Research found that maths, science and computing are leaving the classroom in droves because of stress and poor pay.

It found that about 10.4 per cent of science teachers left the profession each year compared with 10.2 per

cent for maths, 10.2 per cent for languages and 10 per cent for technology.

English was just behind at 9.7 per cent. The figure for arts, drama and music was lower at 8.4 per cent, with history and geography 8.5 per cent. Only 5.9 per cent of PE teachers left.

For maths, the figures suggest that about 3,600 teachers are quitting each year out of a total of 35,000 in secondaries in England and Wales. The study used data from 2011 to 2015.

The Leigh Academies Trust turned to the device after their trials involved using it to see if it reduced symptoms of anxiety, depression and sleep difficulties among staff.

The pilot found that “participants had better post-treatment sleep quality” and the changes were so impressive, the Trust has now

invested in their own devices so staff can access them when needed.

Twenty-one staff used the device daily for between 20 and 60 minutes, over a period of 4 weeks.

A number of pre and post measurements were taken to monitor changes in anxiety, depression, sleep and general welfare.

Staff at the University of Greenwich carried out the statistical analysis of the results. The £549 devices is also being trialled on 120 patients at the Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust in a year-long study to see if it is economically feasible to be rolled out nationally for all NHS patients.

It is already being used on the NHS Improving Access to Psychological Therapies programme to help treat patients with anxiety disorders.

Peter Caunt, of the Nottinghamshire Healthcare Trust, said: "We know this type of therapy works.

“The key to this study is to find out how cost-effective it can be compared to conventional treatments involving tablets and cognitive behavioural therapies.”