MENTAL HEALTH

Get on with your colleagues

Sustaining healthy working relationships takes effort and a bit of reflection – but it’s worth it, says mental health nurse Ian Hulatt

If we agree with the World Health Organization statement that there is no health without mental health, then we acknowledge that our health is too complex to be defined as mere absence of physical illness.

It means that we are beings who, unlike much healthcare provision, have equal and interdependent physical and mental dimensions of ourselves.

If that seems rather too complex an idea, then let’s remember that mental health awareness week in May focused on relationships.

It seems that nearly every day or week in the annual calendar is dedicated to some clinical condition that needs our attention.

Many of these messages can seem distant from our personal experience and perhaps secretly we hope they will remain so.

But mental health and relationships – surely these are things we can all relate to.

Our relationships with others can provide not only rich comfort and replenishing human interactions, but also the most infuriating experiences.

In fact, I wonder if the difficulties that cause us the most stress at work aren’t clinical and technical, but interpersonal.

So it is useful to be asked to focus on those we relate to and consider how we can build and maintain the relationships that sustain us and others.

It is small wonder that work relationships can be fraught at times – after all, we might find ourselves working with people we would not ordinarily choose to spend time with. So how can tensions be addressed?

Initially, it is probably useful to recognise that we bring something to every encounter.

Secondly, if relationships are becoming tense we might ask ourselves the fundamental question: ‘What exactly is going on here?’

Finally and possibly most importantly, we can ask: ‘What one small change on my part will make a difference?’

Sustaining and maintaining relationships in work settings takes effort but it is, invariably, effort that pays off for all concerned.

Ian Hulatt