

# Safety Clicks

Learning from  
others' mistakes

Volume 29

A TDI-Brooks Publication

May 1, 2018

## Mental Health at Sea

By Shannon Smith

Most of our articles and stories focus on accident prevention and maintaining a safe work environment. But the most important part of that work environment is in your head. Literally.

Mental health is not a topic easily discussed in the maritime world, but "Sea Madness" is not a recent development. During the Napoleonic war the head physician of the Royal Navy estimated that mental illness was seven times more likely among the navy population than the general public.

Working for months away from home and family in close quarters with few opportunities for time off or shore leave lead to depression and anxiety at the very least. Even in modern times, the worst cases of violence, suicide and mutiny still occur.

Language barriers and a lack of shared cultural references can make it difficult for crews to form the level of trust required to even discuss mental health issues.

Your state of mind affects every relationship you have, everything you do and how you do it. It affects not just your safety, but the safety of everyone you work with. Use the proactive tips at the end of this newsletter to take care of yourself. If you need help, talk about it with someone you trust.

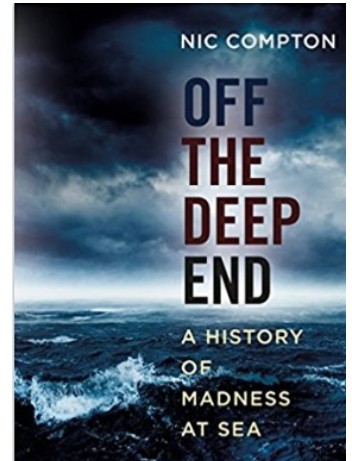
## **Study: More Than a Quarter of Seafarers Polled Reported Signs of Depression**

gCaptain article March 28, 2018

A study of more than 1,000 seafarers was carried out by international maritime charity Sailors' Society and Yale University. More than a quarter of seafarers reported showing symptoms of depression, according to a study of seafarers' mental health presented this month during a Wellness at Sea conference this in London.

According to the study, 26 percent reported they had felt "down, depressed or hopeless" on several days over the previous two weeks.

**Not surprisingly, many seafarers said that isolation from their families and length of their contracts have a big impact on their health, but the quality and amount of food on board was also found to have an impact, the study showed.**



Nic Compton's book *Off the Deep End* ... explores the long history of madness at sea and how that is echoed in many of today's yacht races. It looks at the often-marginal behavior of sailors living both figuratively and literally outside society's usual rules. And it also looks at the sea's power to heal, as well as cause, madness.



**Wellness At Sea** app  
by Sailors' Society

## **TOP Safety Card Hits** (Fleetwide last month)

**Safety Attitude 24**

**Housekeeping 11**

**Communications 8**

## Mental Health at Sea

Nearly half (45 per cent) of the seafarers who reported symptoms of depression said they had not asked anybody for help. While around one-third said they had turned to family or friends, only 21 percent said they had spoken to a colleague on board despite spending months on a ship with them.

Dan Thompson, 29, from London, had to take time out away from his job as a navigation officer due to depression. He spoke at the conference:

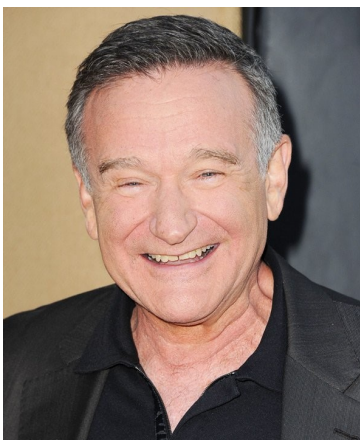
“The reason I became ill was primarily my job – the workload, the sleep deprivation and the pressures of the job. Having lived at sea I would anticipate the numbers of people suffering from depression to be even higher than those who admitted it in the survey.

“Our industry is generally more ‘macho’ than many others. The attitude is to just toughen up and get on with it. There is a fear of talking about it openly, of losing your job,” Thompson said.

Sailors’ Society works with seafarers in 91 ports around the world and offers counselling and support to those struggling with depression and other issues. Its Wellness at Sea coaching programme and app teaches seafarers about wellness and gives them practical tools to help them stay physically and mentally fit at sea.

Sailors’ Society Deputy CEO, Sandra Welch, commented: “Seafarers spend months on end at sea, facing some of the toughest conditions of any workforce – isolation, cramped living quarters, noise, heat, storms – sometimes they’re not even able to stomach the food on board.

“This report is a wake-up call to the industry about the huge impact this is having on seafarers’ mental health. We’re working with shipping companies to help them offer the best care to their employees, who are the life blood of the industry and our global economy.”



All it takes is a beautiful fake smile to hide an injured soul and they will never notice how broken you really are!

- Robin Williams

## Taking Care of Your Mental Wellness

### Individual Tips

**Exercise**— physical activity is proven to elevate mood and relieve depression and anxiety. The **Wellness At Sea** app describes several short exercise routines of between 4—6 minutes that can easily be done on the vessel and with no equipment. If the weather is nice, do them outside.

**Nutrition**— Eat regularly and make more healthy choices than unhealthy ones. **Be sure to stay hydrated!** A good guide is to divide your weight (in pounds) by half. That is how many ounces of water you should be drinking a day.

**Rest**— Your rest periods are scheduled and limited. Take full advantage of them to get both physical rest and mental relaxation. Plan ahead to make time for yourself.

**Controlled Breathing**— US Navy Seals use a technique called box breathing to stay calm and focused. Inhale for 4 seconds, hold your breath for 4 seconds, breath out for 4 seconds, then held your lungs empty for 4 seconds. Repeat for 5 minutes. Slowly increase to 6 and then 8 second intervals.

## Taking Care of Your Mental Wellness

### Vessel Tips

**Morale**— Find ways to improve the morale on board. The longer we are on board, the lower our mood drops and typically people start to stay alone more and socialize less. Plan a cookout, game or movie night for the crew. Celebrate milestones, like birthdays, number of cores completed or completion of a project.



**Food**— Food is one of the most important elements in improving seafarer morale. Ensure that meals are appealing, nutritious, culturally appropriate when possible and in adequate amounts. If the crew is from a culture where rice is served at every meal, then make sure to serve rice at every meal. If the culture prefers tortillas over bread, make sure tortillas are available at meals. A hungry crewman is a grumpy crewman and a taste of home can go a LONG way to improving attitudes.

### Helpful Resources



#### **S**top!

Just pause for a moment

#### **T**ake a breath

Notice your breathing as you breathe in and out.

#### **O**bserve

What thoughts are going through your mind right now?

Where is your focus of attention?

What are you reacting to?

What sensations do you notice in your body?

#### **P**ull back – put in some perspective

What's the bigger picture?

Take the helicopter view.

What is another way of looking at this situation?

What advice would I give a friend?

What would a trusted friend say to me right now?

**Wellness At Sea** is a smart phone app developed by the Sailors' Society ([www.sailors-society.org](http://www.sailors-society.org)). It offers a daily log for tracking your personal, social, emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual well being. While some parts of the app require internet connection, the wellness tracker, exercises, nutrition information and recipes are available offline. While not specific to any religion or faith, the app encourages the user to read their sacred text to support spiritual wellness. The app does include an English Standard Version of the Bible and study plan.

**The Seamen's Church Institute (SCI)** was founded in 1834 and offers a wide range of services to seafarers. Based out of North America, the SCI renders services with respect to a seafarer's personal, professional as well as spiritual needs. These services span the areas of education, pastoral care and legal help. More information can be found on their website at [www.seamenschurch.org](http://www.seamenschurch.org).

**International Seafarers Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN)** is a charity exclusively for seafarers aimed at providing free and confidential services. SeafarerHelp is a 24 hour multilingual helpline offered by this organization. Direct dial +44 (0)20 7323 2737 to request a call back or email them directly at [help@seafarerhelp.org](mailto:help@seafarerhelp.org). More information can be found on their website at [seafarerswelfare.org](http://seafarerswelfare.org).