



IJF role crucial not only with physical issues

FOR many who have become used to spending their days riding racehorses in races, indefinite injury breaks can be hard to handle. For some, very hard indeed.

When jockey Jennifer Ferguson was badly hurt in a fall two years ago she was forced to face up to a long period out of action. That proved difficult, and although she does not believe she suffered from depression, she accepts she might well have done but for the help of family, friends and the Injured Jockeys Fund.

Ferguson says: "As a jockey you're always craving a buzz and you can't get the buzz you get from racing anywhere else. When you can't ride it's difficult and frustrating so I had to fill my days with enough to keep myself busy. The support I received from the Injured Jockeys Fund was amazing and the almoner Lucy Charnock was brilliant.

"I knew from the moment I woke up in the mornings if it was going to be a difficult day. There were days when I just didn't feel good, mainly through tiredness, and I would think to myself: 'Oh no.' Even if I couldn't see it myself, my identical twin sister could, and she would either finish work early or make sure I wasn't at home on my own for long."

Charnock regularly deals with people hit by mental health illness, given the IJF is very much not simply concerned with those hurt physically. She says: "A huge part of what we do relates to people suffering from mental health issues and we receive a lot of professional training about recognising mental health problems.

"Often what we come into contact with is profound depression, but we also deal with addiction on a regular basis. Any form of addiction is tricky but particularly alcoholism as it makes people mean, manipulative, moody and obstructive. That is isolating, which makes alcoholics more prone to their addiction."

talk about these things. There's no point hiding in a bottle because there are no answers there."

For many in the sport's wider workforce, a great source of help in finding answers has been Racing Welfare, whose own 24-hour helpline has been expanded into a digital service, the Racing Support Line. According to the organisation's greatly respected specialist Joe Carter, the enhanced offering will prove of great benefit to the industry.

"These are normal human issues," says Carter. "There will always be challenges in life, whether or not you work in racing. The commonality is people have a set of ingredients that create a specific set of issues and challenges. The ingredients are different but the challenges are the same.

"We can get stuck in many different ways, dependency and addiction being just one. However, the route out from any kind of dead end is to bring the stuff out, rather than pushing it down.

"There are other industries with similar support charities. Their approach would be to do the same thing, which is to say, you're important, we care about you, you work in our industry and we want you to know you're not alone and that there is help here if you want it."

Particularly pleased the help options available to riders have been strengthened by the instigation of the PJA helpline is BHA chief medical adviser Dr Jerry Hill.

"It's a great asset," says Hill. "If someone in racing is now brave enough

to come out and speak about their situation they have somewhere to go. That would not previously have been the case. Thanks to the helpline they can declare their problem and move forward with treatment.

"As an industry we need to acknowledge there are mental health problems. We need to make people understand it's okay to have a mental health problem and you don't have to deal with it alone or within the confines of your family."

'Helpline put me in touch with right people'

One of those who had been struggling with mental illness within such a tight circle was a jockey who wishes to remain anonymous but is keen to report he has been one of the first to ring the helpline. Following that call and six funded talking therapy sessions he has felt a weight lifted from him.

The jockey says: "I had been suffering from depression for a year or so due to various personal reasons. I didn't realise myself what was happening and my partner convinced me to contact the PJA. I was looked after brilliantly and put in touch with the right people to make things better.

"I've managed to turn the corner and am grateful for the help. Anyone in the same boat shouldn't hesitate to make the call – it will cost them nothing and they won't regret it."

His message is clear and is echoed by Enright, who himself realised he was not

WAYS TO HELP

▶▶ To donate to the Injured Jockeys Fund go to injuredjockeys.co.uk/donations.asp or ring 01638 662246

▶▶ To donate to Racing Welfare go to racingwelfare.co.uk/Getting-Involved/How-to-Donate or ring 01638 560 763

alone in the weeks and months after speaking about his illness, first to a friend and later to the racing community, whose reaction he had once feared for so long.

"Talking about it was the best thing I ever did," he says. "It helped me in ways I still probably don't understand. It wiped the slate clean and made it possible for me to start afresh.

"I honestly thought I was the only person in the world suffering that bad. After I did the piece in the Racing Post it showed me that having depression is almost as common as having the flu these days. No one treated me any differently. A couple of jockeys also approached me and went to get help with their problem.

"There are still good days and bad days, but I'm able to get through the bad days better than I once was. In the past I would bottle things up and a bad day would turn into a bad two months. I'm in good shape now."

PJA CONFIDENTIAL HELPLINE

In partnership with Cognacity

No obligation, no demands, no stigma – just help when you need it



The life of a jockey can have many highs, but given the lifestyle of a jockey – restricted diet, self-employed with no guaranteed income, risk of injury, long hours – it can also be very demanding.

Mental health is just as important as physical health. The Confidential Helpline has been set up for jockeys who would like to talk to a professional counsellor and therapist in absolute confidence.

If you are struggling with a personal issue such as depression, family issues, bereavement, drink, drugs, gambling dependency or anything else that may be affecting your race riding and your life in general, help is just a phone call away.

- Free confidential help and support when and where you need it.
- Experienced, professional counsellors and therapists and life coaches who understand the pressures of your profession.
- The first call is just the start. Face-to-face meetings as close to your home, or at home, will follow as soon as a need is ascertained.
- PJA members have free access to the line and the first five sessions of any treatment plan are free as part of their membership.
- Funding for additional sessions may be available from the IJF.
- Retired jockeys may be referred to the helpline through the Injured Jockeys Fund.



CALL THE CONFIDENTIAL HELPLINE ANY TIME ON
0844 800 6873

COGNACITY



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TOMORROW: FROM JOCKEY TO EX-JOCKEY

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