

Supporting Employees in the Workplace

A Presentation of the ECL Patient Support Working Group to help
Employers and Employees Navigate the Cancer Journey

Developed by:

Liz Atkinson

**Cancer Focus Northern
Ireland**

Olwyn Ryan

Irish Cancer Society

The Association of European Cancer Leagues

- Pan-European umbrella organization created in 1980
- Members are cancer organizations mainly at the national level: 25 members in 21 countries
- Member leagues have a combined income of over 200 million Euro, over 2,500 staff members, and more than 70,000 volunteers.
- ECL is source of information on cancer, on European initiatives set up at the European level; on EU decisions and legislations etc
- ECL is unique platform of exchange of best practices for leagues.
 - Patient Support Working Group



What is Cancer?

- **Organs and tissues of the body are made up of cells. Cancer is a disease of these cells caused by abnormal cell development and growth.**
- **Cancer not a single disease with a single cause or single treatment.**
- **200 types of cancer with its own name and treatments.**
- **Complex disease**

What is the Problem?

Cancer now affects 1:3 people in Europe

- **(Insert country figures)** new cancer diagnosis each year in **(your country)**
- **(Insert number)** people living in **(country)** with cancer
- Cancer now a chronic illness due to a number of factors including early diagnosis, developments in treatments and an aging population/people living longer
- Many of people will still be working during and after treatment

2005: UK Survey of 300 cancer patients

(Cancer BACKUP 2005)

Showed employers did not understand the true needs of employees with cancer because:

- Less than 50% were offered flexible working arrangements
- 40% said their overall working life had deteriorated
- Just over 33% felt their career prospects had deteriorated

And because...

- **25% feared disclosing their cancer to their employer**
- **33% lost confidence in their ability to do their job**
- **31% did not return to work after cancer**
- **61% experienced financial difficulties**

2006 Survey of 219 Employers

Cancer BACKUP, 'CIPD, Working with Cancer: Survey Report 2006

- **More than 40% of employers did not provide any support or information to employees with Cancer**
- **36% did not know if any such information was available**
- **66% did not provide managers with training to support employees with cancer**

- **22% were not aware that Disability Legislation in UK included a cancer diagnosis**
- **73% did not have a formal policy in place for managing employees with cancer**

2007 Survey of Breast Cancer Patients

(Breast Cancer Care UK 2007)

- Breast cancer patients not aware of their employment rights once diagnosed
- 25% said employer's attitude had a negative impact on their ability to cope financially
- 19% had regular meetings with employer during treatment to discuss managing workload **but Less than 25% had meetings re workload after treatment**

- **20% said they had access to occupational health or HR to discuss work related issues during treatment and 23% had access after treatment**
- **Respondents reported feeling forced to work for financial reasons when they were unfit. Lack of extended paid sick leave or paid time off for medical appointments were also cited as areas of concern.**

European study 2009

Jutta Oelgod ECL Patient Support Group

The main issues:

- a need for special considerations at the work place when returning to work
- employers understanding that a cancer disease can vary in duration and last longer than 1 year

Special considerations in the work place

- Some employers do not understand the needs of cancer patients returning to work - **Necessary adjustments do not / cannot always take place**
- Communication with colleagues and employers - things can be rather awkward
- Communication about job security - not knowing causes uncertainty and anxiety
- Some workplaces show little or no confidence in an employee with cancer

A cancer diagnosis impacts on every aspect of an individual's life and family.

- Physical
- Emotional
- Social
- Spiritual

A Busy Time

- G.P.
- Hospital Visits and tests
- Test results and diagnosis
- Surgery / Chemotherapy / Radiotherapy
- Treatment completed – where to now? Insecurity about remission or relapse
- Waiting Game – for tests, results, diagnosis etc
- Emotional Roller Coaster

In the Workplace

You will have employees who may:

- **Have had major surgery**
- **Be upset and anxious**
- **Be worried about their body image**
- **Still be undergoing treatment**
- **Wear a wig or head covering to hide hair loss**
- **Be trying to get on with their life following treatment**
- **Be trying to deal with bad news**

How do you deal with this?

What are the Workplace Issues?

The Employee

- Telling the employer
- Guilt about taking time off work
- Anxiety about side effects of treatments
- Fears about job security or loss of promotion prospects
- Being seen as the weakest link amongst colleagues

The Employee..

- **Lack of personal confidence in ability to work effectively**
- **Dealing with other colleagues distress and reactions to their diagnosis**
- **Not knowing what the future holds**
- **Not wanting to be treated differently**
- **Financial worries – sick pay and benefits**
- **Returning to work after treatment**

Employer's Issues

- **Searching for a balance between company procedures and needs and the employees' needs**
- **Confidentiality – respecting wishes of employee and let them take the lead in how much they want to disclose**
- **Need to listen and establish good line of communication early on**
- **Calm and sympathetic approach**

Employer's Issues

- Encourage openness with employee to get support of other staff
- Dealing with absences – Managing and balancing the impact of an employees time off on the team's work load
- Cultural sensitivity
- Support around time off, job security, future prospects

Employer's Issues

- **Barriers to communication**
 - Myths and attitudes to cancer**
 - Pity**
 - Excessive sympathy**
- **Making a difference is about what you say and how you say it**
- **Asking informed questions based on knowledge of disease/treatments**
- **Choice of language – try to avoid negative terms like sufferer, victim, battling cancer**

Support for Return to Work could include:

- Reasonable Adjustments
- Phased return to work
- Flexible working or reduced hours
- Home Working
- Additional work breaks
- Suspend lone working
- Avoid excessive travel

And/or...

- **Reallocation of work duties**
- **Prioritising work duties**
- **Adjustment of performance targets**
- **Work equipment – is it ok?**
- **Temporary change of work area**
- **Consider Parking space closer entrance**
- **Training for new skills**

And/or

- **Alternative employment – are other roles available?**
- **Time off for medical appointments**
- **Sickness leave**
- **Compassionate leave**
- **Colleague mentor**
- **Training for managers and supervisors around cancer issues and information and support available**

Other Considerations/Issues

- Legal rights of Employers
- Legal rights of Employees
- Health and Safety Legislation
- Development of a personnel policy to manage an employee with serious illness
- Human Rights and Anti discrimination legislation
- Disability Legislation

A positive example of employer supported return to work

- *Female patient with breast cancer*
- A 42-year old tool maker was diagnosed with breast cancer, was operated on and had chemotherapy. She was on sick leave for a year during which time she kept in contact with the work place and also participated in an internal work shop for long term sick employees.
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- After she returned to work she started on just a few hours twice a week. As a result of an agreement between the company and the local job centre, special appliances were installed at her work place so she could avoid lifting heavy items that could cause lymphoedema in her arms and hands. The equipment was primarily financed by the job center.
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- Ms A quickly increased her working performance and after working part time for 6 months she returned to full time employment and can now manage most of her former tasks again.
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- *Anonymous example from the Patient Support Department of the Danish Cancer Society*

Any Questions

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