



## Best Practice: Healthy Workplace, Healthy Workforce - Guidance for Managers

### Introduction

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It is estimated that illness at work costs UK employers £12.2 billion a year, as a result of sick days taken. Whatever the cause of ill health, it is in the interests of the organisation to support an employee's return to work wherever possible.

Health issues can not only affect the individuals concerned but can also have a detrimental effect on the wider workforce and the organisation's performance. Organisations should be aware of possible problems and be confident that they have the background knowledge and policies in place to deal with them.

*According to research recently conducted by the Institute: "The Quality of Working Life 2007", 42 per cent of managers reported that sickness rates in their organisation had increased over the last year. 67 per cent of managers who suffered ill health reported that it had affected their productivity levels. There appears to be an emerging trend that absence and sickness rates are on the increase and there is a high degree of ill health that does not necessarily translate into days off but appears to be affecting motivation levels.*

This guide seeks to raise awareness of health and well-being issues, the effects on organisations, strategies for dealing with ill health and suggests how a policy may be implemented.

### Ill health in the workplace

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It is recognised that many factors from genetics to the external environment can cause or trigger ill health. There are, however, numerous health conditions that can be caused or exacerbated by the workplace:

- **Stress**  
The adverse reaction that people have to excessive pressure or demands being placed upon them. Stress accounts for one in three new incidences of ill health at work. This leads to reduced performance of the individual and will also affect others around them.
- **Musculo-skeletal disorders**  
These include repetitive strain injuries (RSI) and back and joint pain. Problems are increasing principally through the intensive use of computers and other technology, or simply poor manual handling practices such as picking up objects without bending the knees. Posture related health problems are also growing due to the sedentary nature of many jobs.
- **Minor illness**  
This includes coughs, colds and headaches. In the majority of cases these do not result in sick leave being taken, but they may affect motivation and performance.
- **Accidents**  
Injuries and deaths arising from accidents are due to many things including lack of forethought in preventative planning, faulty work practices and unprotected machinery.

Whether caused by work or not, employee illness or injury can be affected by workplace support structures. Having practical policies, information and support available can reduce the sick leave taken by an employee, and in some cases prevent an employee leaving.

### The Business Case

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*Health issues should be driven by the understanding that improved health and well-being can generate significant employee productivity benefits resulting in higher levels of motivation.*

Maintaining the health and well-being of employees can have the potential to benefit an organisation in the following ways:

- **Reduced absenteeism**  
An effective absence management policy and improved health in the workforce can reduce the number of days taken off work and the amount spent on sick pay.
- **Improved productivity**  
When staff are absent through illness or injury the financial cost is not just sick pay, but also lost productivity and output.
- **Losing fewer experienced staff through retirement on ill health grounds**  
Few organisations can afford to lose expensively trained and valuable employees through ill health.
- **Attracting and retaining the best staff**  
Effective health and well-being policies and practices can enhance an organisation's reputation as an employer of choice, helping

to attract and retain well qualified, skilled and experienced staff. This has cost benefits as it is estimated that the cost of replacing an employee is about five times their monthly salary. It also reduces the loss of knowledge through having to replace skilled and experienced employees.

- **Improving staff morale**  
Institute research demonstrates how healthy staff are likely to be more motivated, productive and committed to the strategic goals of the organisation.
- **Improving employee relations**  
This enhances corporate image, and helps to reduce conflict in the workplace, which can be a key contributor to workplace stress and absence from work.
- **Reducing premiums for health insurance**  
A healthier workforce will mean employees have less need to use health insurance; consequently premiums are likely to be lower.

## Working 'Wounded'

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*One in three managers thought there was a culture of not taking time off for sickness in their organisation.*

Not all health issues cause employees to take sickleave; some employees while suffering from illness may feel pressurised or are acting through misplaced loyalty when they attend work. This has the potential to affect an organisation in two ways:

- employees may prolong their illness resulting in a negative effect on their quality of work.
- employees may pass on their illness to others, causing further absence within the organisation.

Both aspects are indicative of hidden costs as there are no costs in terms of sick leave taken, but the reduction in productivity could be more costly in the long term.

## Managing absence

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Employees suffering from ill health may need time off work to recover effectively. Providing sickness absence is accurately monitored it can be effectively managed, by such means as:

- **Keeping in touch**  
If an employee is on long-term sickness leave, just keeping in regular touch at times organised between the manager and the employee will show that the organisation cares. Regular contact can help prevent feelings of isolation and encourage recovery and return to work.
- **Return to work interviews**  
These can identify short-term absence problems at an early stage and provide an opportunity to start a dialogue about underlying issues which may be causing the absence.
- **Disciplinary procedures for unacceptable absence levels**  
These can be applied to make it clear that unjustified absence will not be tolerated and that absence policies will be enforced. There should be robust systems in place to monitor and manage both short and long term absences from work due to ill health.
- **Recuperative programmes**  
These can enable employees with more serious illness or injury to return to work earlier than otherwise possible, by facilitating short term adjustments such as reduced working hours, change of duties or location. The aim is to provide organisational support and flexibility to reintegrate the employee and work towards a resumption of full duties in an agreed period of time. Occupational health professionals can assess an individual's workplace needs and make appropriate recommendations for recuperative duties. This can be put in place and monitored following agreement by the employee and their line manager.

## "Well-being Management"

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*There is some evidence to show that where particular health benefits are offered, absence levels are lowered. These benefits included nutritional advice, health/fitness coaching, private healthcare insurance, health screenings and healthy eating facilities.*

The concept of well-being should be acknowledged if the full benefits of the business case are to be realised. This moves beyond the requirements of legislation and is more proactive - encouraging wellbeing and continued attendance at work.

There are numerous strategies for well-being, which can be split into two categories; illustrated by the following equation:

**Well people + well managed = well organisation**

### Well People

Promoting healthier lifestyles: ensuring that individuals can perform to the best of their abilities by offering such organisational facilities as:

- Advice lines
- Coaching services
- Counselling services
- Ergonomics advice
- Family friendly policies and procedures that take account of caring responsibilities, domestic crises and bereavement
- Flexible work options
- Gym membership or provision of in-house gym facilities
- Healthy eating facilities
- Private medical insurance
- Personal evaluation of health risks

## Well Managed

*Where innovative and accessible styles of management prevail, managers report a significantly lower number of days' sickness absence: 1.94 days in innovative organisations and 2.50 days in accessible organisations in contrast to the average of 3.46 days per year.*

This is a holistic approach, a way of management that implies a comprehensive review of existing people management practices and takes into account job design, management styles and working environment to improve the productivity of an organisation.

### Job Design:

Good job design increases the employee's perception of 'control' over their working environment. Research suggests that employees who feel externally controlled have a less positive attitude to their work than those who have a higher degree of role autonomy and thus in greater control of their working environment.

### Management Styles:

A high level of reciprocal trust between manager and employee and innovative and accessible management styles are beneficial in helping to reduce absence rates. Institute research shows that an authoritarian style of management significantly depresses all aspects of job enjoyment and has a negative impact on motivation health and productivity levels.

### Environment:

A well managed work environment also contributes to well-being in terms of good ventilation, appropriate temperature, noise and light control, and good hygiene of air and water.

## Developing a health policy

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*Where absence management and stress management policies are in place, there is some evidence that absence is lower, but the differences are not marked, which suggests that some of these policies are not as effective as they could be.*

Despite high media visibility and a growing awareness of health issues, many health policies are still not always effective. To be able to work towards a healthier workplace, it is important that an effective policy is implemented. Steps that should be considered include:

- gain commitment from senior management
- find out and assess what could cause harm to health within the workplace
- identify who might be harmed – public, visitors, employees
- consult with employees on solutions to highlighted problems
- decide what action should occur to prevent or lessen the chance of harm
- determine the responsibilities of managers and contact officers
- communicate the policies to employees through effective channels
- make available training for managers, health and safety representatives and staff
- implement, monitor, and review policy

The culture of an organisation, the type of business and the personality and management style of those in positions of authority are all factors that must be taken into consideration when developing a policy.

## Summary

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A healthier workforce means employees are more motivated and productive, have higher attendance levels and return to work more quickly after episodes of ill health. Any well-being policies need to be realistic and considered in their approach, integrated into management systems, giving both employees and managers the willingness to buy into the idea and make it work.

## Further Information

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Further information may be obtained from:

### Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

<http://www.cipd.org.uk/> <http://www.cipd.co.uk/> (<http://www.cipd.co.uk/>)

Provides a series of booklets on mental health, stress at work, and occupational health and an absence management toolkit for managers

**Desktop Lawyer**

<http://www.desktoplawyer.co.uk> (<http://www.desktoplawyer.co.uk/>)

An overview the laws applying to different workplaces

**European Network of Workplace Health Promotion**

<http://www.enwhp.org> (<http://www.enwhp.org/>)

Provides good practice information for workplace health promotion across all European Workplaces.

**Federation of European Employers**

<http://www.fedee.com/wellness.shtml> (<http://www.fedee.com/wellness.shtml>)

Provides a breakdown of a model wellness policy

**Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland**

<http://www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk> (<http://www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk/>)

Provides public and professional information on best practice for health promotion, along with research and policy advice.

**Health and Safety Executive**

<http://www.hse.gov.uk> (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/>)

Responsible for health and safety regulation in the UK. Also provides a stress management toolkit

**Institution of Occupational Safety and Health**

<http://www.iosh.co.uk> (<http://www.iosh.co.uk/>)

Europe's leading body for health and safety professionals. Provides a toolkit for the managing of health and safety risks in small firms

**RSI Awareness**

<http://www.rsi.org.uk> (<http://www.rsi.org.uk/>)

Information, forums, factsheets and directory of support services for repetitive strain conditions

**Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives**

<http://www.healthyworkinglives.com> (<http://www.healthyworkinglives.com/>)

Provides free, confidential advice, resources and support on all aspects of workplace health, available on-line, by phone, or through its network of local Healthy Working Lives Advisors.

**Welsh Assembly Government**

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/improvement/work/> (<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/improvement/work/>)

<http://www.cymru.gov.uk/qwelliaiechydnygwaith> (<http://www.cymru.gov.uk/qwelliaiechydnygwaith>) Provides businesses in Wales with free advice, support and recognition for all aspects of health and well being in the workplace.

This document is intended for guidance only. It cannot claim to be comprehensive and appropriate to each individual member or circumstance.

Expert opinion should be always be obtained in cases of doubt.