Return to work after cancer: occupational safety and health considerations

Background
Increasing numbers of people are either returning to work after cancer treatment or continuing to work through treatment. Occupational safety and health (OSH) practitioners and others need evidence-based approaches to risk assessment and risk management to support those undergoing treatment for, or returning to work after, cancer.

Aims
- To understand the health and safety implications of returning to work after cancer
- To identify what employers can do to facilitate return to work (RTW) and what is good practice in dealing with OSH issues for cancer survivors who return to work
- To develop guidance to support employers to implement appropriate adjustments

Methods
- Systematic literature review to integrate existing evidence on the OSH aspects of RTW after cancer
- Case studies examining the RTW process in different organisations, including interviews with those who had returned to work, their line manager, and other staff involved in the process

Results
The research provided evidence for a range of good practices, for employers, including:
- Tailoring approaches to the specific needs of the individual
- The employee and employer holding regular discussions
- Having an agreed written plan for returning to work
- Having a rehabilitation/RTW policy in place for all illnesses including cancer, and ensuring OSH practitioners are involved in policy development
- Following guidance in relation to a graduated/phased return to work
- Using flexible working to reduce the impact of fatigue
- Ensuring an individualised risk assessment is carried out for work tasks when an employee returns to work, and for those who continue to work through treatment
- Ensuring that the risk assessment is reviewed regularly to reflect changes in capability during treatment and recovery
- Identifying risk reduction measures, including the journey to work, work tasks and interactions with the public (or infection sources)
- Managing the workload to reduce any pressure points
- Providing information and training to key people, including line managers, HR and OSH practitioners
- Understanding the potential long-term impact of cancer and its treatments

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To find out more about this research and to access the toolkit materials, visit www.iosh.co.uk/rtwcancer.

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