

Briefing

Employment adjustments for people who have Cancer

Abridged content for sample purposes

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Introduction

What is cancer?

Cancer is a disease caused by normal cells changing so that they grow in an uncontrolled way.

The uncontrolled growth may cause a lump called a tumour to form. On its own a tumour could make an individual quite ill, for example by pressing against nerves, blocking the digestive system or blood vessels, or by releasing hormones that can affect the normal workings of the body. Should a tumour become malignant and spread to other parts of the body then this becomes more difficult to treat and can make an individual very ill because more parts of the body are affected, sometimes making their life prognosis uncertain.

Cancer is an illness that affects many people of all ages. It is estimated that 2.5 million people in the UK have had a cancer diagnosis^[1] and around 1 in 2 people in the UK will develop some form of cancer in their lifetime.^[2] There are approximately 890,000 people of working age who have cancer in the UK^[3] with a further 360,000 diagnosed every year.^[4]

In addition to the significant physical impact of cancer, for many people there is also a psychological impact of a cancer diagnosis.

[1] Macmillan. Cancer statistics (Accessed 26th January 2018).
Figures as per 2015.

[2] Cancer Research UK. Press release 2015 (Accessed 26th January 2018).

[3] Macmillan. The rich picture – people of working age who have cancer, 2017 update, p.2, (Accessed 26th January 2018).
Figures as per 2015.

[4] Cancer Research UK. Cancer statistics. (Accessed 26th January 2018).
Figures as per 2015.

Carcinomas

About 85% of cancers are carcinomas. They start in the epithelium, which forms the covering of the body (skin) and the lining of the organs in the body. The common forms of breast, lung, prostate and bowel cancer are all carcinomas.

Leukaemias

Leukaemia is a cancer that affects the tissues where white blood cells (which fight infection in the body) are formed, i.e. the bone marrow and lymphatic system. Leukaemia and lymphoma are quite rare and make up about 6.5% of all cancers.

Lymphomas and myelomas

These two types of cancer affect the immune system. Lymphomas (5% of cases) affect the lymphatic system that runs throughout the body, filters fluid and fights infection; myelomas (1% of cases) start in the plasma, one of the components of blood, that helps fight infections.

Brain and spinal cord cancers

About 3% of cases affect the nervous system formed in the brain and spinal cord. The nervous system controls the body by producing (in the brain) electric messages which are sent throughout the body via nerves.

Sarcomas

Sarcomas represent less than 1% of all cancers, sarcomas affect the connective tissues such as bones (osteosarcoma) and soft tissues (cartilage or muscle).

Effects of cancer and cancer treatments on a person

How cancer and cancer treatments affect a person will depend on:

- The cancer: the type of cancer, where it is located in the body, how fast it is growing and whether it has spread to other parts of the body (advanced cancer).

Cancers may cause a number of different symptoms that may impact on an employee at work, for example: abnormal bleeding; tiredness; unexplained weight loss; and pain.

- The treatment: the types of treatments used, how long treatment is given for, and the side effects of treatment.

Cancer treatments can cause a variety of side effects. These may include being more prone to infection, fatigue (extreme tiredness), sickness, mouth problems (for example, sore or dry mouth), digestive problems (for example, loss of appetite, diarrhoea), nerve damage (for example, tingling or numbness in fingers or toes) and hair loss.

Employment adjustments for people who have Cancer

Cancer can affect the life prognosis of a person, particularly when no treatment can stop its progression or when an individual's body does not respond to treatment.

- Other health problems: whether the person has other significant health problems for example heart problems, chest problems, or diabetes.

For many people who have cancer there may be times during their illness and / or treatment when they feel tired and unwell. This may be due to a combination of the symptoms caused by their cancer and side effects from their treatment.

Usually any treatment-related side effects settle after treatment has ended although some may persist for some weeks or months afterwards. However, some side effects of cancer treatments, such as fatigue, are long lasting or permanent.

Employment and people who have Cancer

Under the Equality Act (2010) cancer is recognised as a disability from the point at which it is diagnosed.

Many people who have cancer will be protected under this Act but may not consider themselves to be disabled. Nevertheless employers have a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments and not to discriminate against employees who might be facing barriers at work because of a disability or long-term condition – even if it has not been accepted as such by the individual.

Employers should be aware that non-visible disabilities such as cancer mean that barriers can be less obvious. This means reasonable adjustments may be harder for employers to determine and to put in place. Employers can seek advice from Occupational Health services, Work Coaches and Disability Employment Advisers at Jobcentre Plus who refer people who have cancer for positions. There are also organisations which offer specialist advice and appropriate disability awareness training to help employers ensure that their recruitment process are barrier-free for those who have cancer – **see page 22 for further details.**

It is important that employers have an open and honest conversation with employees about the barriers that may be present in the workplace and what simple measures might help remove these barriers. The best practice approach is to make adjustments for anyone who needs them in order to work effectively and contribute fully to your organisation.

Employment adjustments for people who have Cancer

Most employers will want to know what is 'reasonable'. Doing what seems fair for the individual and others who work for you given the size and resources of your organisation is a good place to start.

This guidance will help you deliver best practice.

- You might need to treat people differently in order to treat them fairly.
- Don't make assumptions about what people can and can't do.
- Ensure that everyone knows who is responsible for doing what and when it must be done.
- Involve the individual in generating solutions and respect their right to confidentiality.

For more detail on the law and making reasonable adjustments contact **Business Disability Forum's Advice Service** on telephone number **+44-(0)20-7403-3020** or by email **advice@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk** or see the Briefing on The Equality Act 2010.

Reasonable adjustments and best practice

85% of employed people who have cancer said how important it is for them to continue work after diagnosis.[5]

Decisions about suitability for employment, promotion or retention are too often based on general assumptions or misconceptions, rather than a factual assessment. This can lead to discrimination against existing or potential employees. The individual facts should always be considered in consultation with the person.

The impact of cancer varies from one person to another, sometimes affecting a person's life prognosis. Employers are advised to talk to the employee and ask them how they would like to be supported in employment.

Managers who work with people who have cancer need to be sensitive to the person, while at the same time exploring what it is about the job that may initially be considered by the person and employer to be problematic.

Consider the skills, abilities and aspirations of each individual and implement appropriate and reasonable support so that everyone can maximise their potential; this can have a positive effect on an organisation as it unlocks different ways of tackling problems and making decisions.

Many adjustments will benefit everyone and may well be simple and inexpensive and therefore make good business sense. Without adjustments, good candidates may not apply for jobs and good employees could be lost. Precise requirements vary from one individual to another. Always ask the person who has cancer what they need.

[5] Macmillan. The rich picture – people of working age who have cancer, 2017 update, p.2, (Accessed 26th January 2018). Figures as per 2015.

Content has been removed for sample purposes. Pages 11 to 23 are available in the full booklet.

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