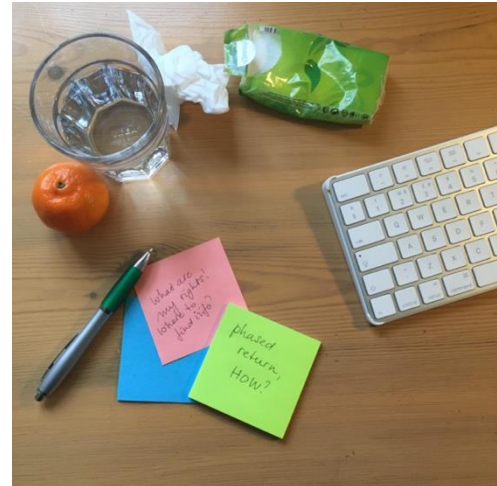


# CANCER AND LOCKDOWN: HOW IT'S AFFECTING US ALL

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It's been a surreal 10 weeks since lockdown began which has posed enormous challenges for everyone, including WWC.

Our coachees have been affected in many different ways but we have learned a lot in supporting them and we wanted to share some of this with you. There is something for everyone here: for employees with cancer, for working carers, for employers, for friends and family and for health professionals too.



## Cancer and lockdown

### Q: What is a return to work if it is virtual?

- Good question! It's still really important to put in place a flexible return to work plan and particularly important to agree:
  - What work can realistically be done from home?
  - What training or retraining is necessary or at least helpful and how it will be provided?
  - What equipment is necessary (e.g. a laptop or special work chair might be needed)?
  - What hours of work are appropriate given the need for a phased return, that recovery is not linear and takes time? What boundaries should be set (e.g. times for rest, exercise, lunch, short breaks)?
  - How far will this be communicated to others and by whom so boundaries are understood and respected?
  - How to keep in touch and how frequently? Also please bear in mind that long video calls can be exhausting, even for those who are perfectly healthy and well.
- And for those who cannot work from home, are there training or other programmes available online to help get them started on the road back to work?
- The longer an individual has been away from work, the tougher it will be for them to get up to speed; it's sensible to assume that a virtual return to work will take longer than expected. Patience is a necessary and important virtue.

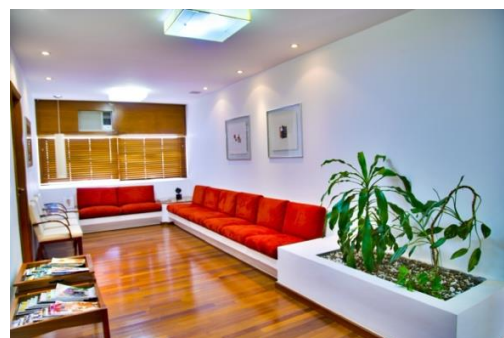
- If, post cancer, someone is transitioning into a new role, and working virtually, it will be equally as tough for them to get up to speed, even though some or most of the work may be familiar.
- And if someone post cancer is taking on a new job in a new company, it will all the more important for them to take things very gradually.

## And what about those who are shielding?

- In these cases, a lot depends on an individual's personal circumstances, their view of the world, and their risk disposition. Employers need to recognise that although some may have adjusted very quickly, others will not have been able to do this at all.
- For some, those who were doing some work at home as part of their return to work post cancer, the lockdown may have equalled things out, helped them feel more connected to the rest of the team and alleviated any guilt about not being in the office. If anything, the lockdown may have been energising.
- Some may have been 'lapping up' work as a welcome distraction from their circumstances or they may just be enjoying their time at home.
- But for others, their lack of control over their current circumstances, their sense of isolation (particularly if they have no immediate family or sources of support) and fear of going out as the lockdown eases, all of this will have been, and will continue to be, hard to bear. It may have affected their sleep, their concentration and their sense of self.
- If you are an employer you have a duty of care, so it's essential to understand these differences and to regularly and frequently keep in touch with those all who are shielding, particularly those who are not coping well. For some employees you might want to designate someone to act as a 'buddy' whose role will be to keep in touch and ensure that person is getting all the support they need.

## Treatment plans and appointments

- Delayed scans, check-ups and treatment are quite naturally another cause of stress and anxiety. If you are an employer, please remain aware of this – it's a big deal.
- For those of you in this uncertain situation, it's best to focus on what you can control and change rather than, for example, wait for other people to contact you with



information. They won't know you are worried or concerned about delays in your treatment unless you let them know that. So, why not speak to your GP and/or your

oncologist/care team about your concerns, arrange a phone or video call, and find out about your options for getting things moving.

## And now that lockdown is ending?

We have moved from a simple message – ‘stay at home’ - to one where we are managing our own risk and dependent on others to act properly, to exercise their civic duty. That makes this next phase scary, uncertain and problematic especially for those who are in a higher risk category.

For those who are shielding, some may feel safer to stay that way but others will once more be made to feel ‘different’, less equal and more isolated than ever. And for those with children and/or partners going back to school or work, there will be added complexities and real fears about keeping safe.

When it comes to setting or abiding by guidelines, the devil will be in the detail. And there is potentially so much detail: about travel; start and finish times; using entrances and exits, using reception areas, lifts, narrow corridors, shared desks, staff coffee points and restaurants, toilets – the list is endless. And what about wearing masks? More importantly, will everyone respect the guidance and what if they don’t? What action will be appropriate?

It’s frankly a nightmare for us all. So, the real issue is that it’s down to each of us to manage our own risk, to manage as best we can what we can personally control. What we all need to cope with is taking some calculated risks. There is still a lot we don’t know about Covid 19 but we can’t shut ourselves away forever. That’s not what life is about.



## One good thing!?

Given so many of us have been able to work from home very successfully we hope that employers will be far more open to making what they might a few months ago have considered an ‘unreasonable’ adjustment, and that those who need to ask for flexible working or the ability to work from home will feel less awkward about doing so.

We always say that however fleeting your brush with cancer, you can’t ever go back to normal, you can only move forward and find a new, and hopefully better version of normal. We hope the same will be true with regard to life after Covid 19.

Keep well everyone and keep safe.