

# OUTSIDE SCHRODERS: WORKING WITH CANCER

*Inside Schrodgers* speaks to Barbara Wilson, a previous Deputy Head of HR at Schrodgers. Following a diagnosis with cancer, Barbara set up Working With Cancer, a social enterprise providing coaching, training and consultancy services to assist people affected by cancer with returning to work

Cancer remains one of the highest causes of death in high income countries and with 30% of people currently living with cancer in the UK of working age, the need to return to work after cancer will become increasingly necessary, so employers need to be prepared.

A recent charitable donation from Schrodgers funded a pilot three-week 'Return to Work' course for people returning to a previous employer after cancer. Barbara

and her associates have worked closely with experts from Maggie's to develop and deliver these workshops. Following its success, the workshops will roll out more widely this year. Maggie's has centres across the UK that provide free practical, emotional and social support for people with cancer and their family and friends.

Barbara shares some of her experiences and approaches to working with cancer:



#### Support from Schrodgers

In the UK, we've partnered with Working With Cancer to offer cancer coaching which can help to identify practical solutions to deal with the physical, psychological and emotional impacts on those with or affected by cancer. Outside the UK, we also provide a variety of support to those impacted by cancer. Please contact HRDirect or your local HR team to learn more.

*"I know of no other commercial organisations which currently fund initiatives of this kind about managing work and cancer for cancer survivors."*



#### Communication

Through our coaching and training services we help people talk about cancer - what to say, and when and how to say it. That could mean preparing them for a difficult conversation with a manager, helping them work out when and how often to keep in touch while they are having treatment or what they might say to their colleagues.



#### Carers

Around 1.1 million people in the UK aged 15 and over are carers of someone with cancer, making up almost 20% of the caring population. The 2010 Equality Act also covers employees with caring responsibilities, a fact often overlooked by employers. Coaching can help carers to address their needs and concerns and provide welcome support at a very difficult time.



#### Support

Ensuring employees feel comfortable coming forward and saying that they've been diagnosed with cancer and that they will need additional support can be a real challenge due to the stigma around cancer and people not wanting to be seen as weak or vulnerable. As cancer is a life-changing event, returning to work may bring not only physical, but also psychological changes such as anxiety, loss of confidence or even temporary depression as people re-examine their lives. They may initially be reluctant to accept coaching or support but almost all are pleased afterwards to have taken it up.



#### Education

As well as educating HR, equipping line managers is crucial so they can support their team. As they're often the first person an employee approaches after diagnosis, they can have the most impact early on, and will remain closely involved during a return to work. Training can also help managers cope with the emotion and stress of cancer occurring in their teams.



#### Confidence

A 2012 survey showed that almost half of working-age people diagnosed with cancer change jobs or leave work afterwards. The 'Return to Work' course pilot run with Maggie's set out to improve confidence among people returning to work after cancer. Feedback showed that all participants felt more confident about knowing when to return to work, became more aware of the reasonable adjustments they were entitled to, and were more confident talking to their employer about their needs.



#### Legislation

Cancer is defined as a disability under the 2010 Equality Act. Consequently, employers have a duty to put in place reasonable adjustments for employees with cancer. This may include amendments such as flexible working, time off for medical appointments, a phased return and altering duties. The emphasis here is on the word 'reasonable'; adjustments should be ones both the employer and the employee can sensibly cope with and manage.