

# Cancer Survivors at Work: The Unspoken Truths

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# Context

- Half of those born after 1960 will have a cancer diagnosis during their lives...
- ...though treatment & survivorship have improved considerably...
- Yet 'return to work' rates among survivors remains low
- Barbara & I have drawn on our own lived experience today to explore why this is and what can be done to improve things

# Cancer & Work – Key Facts

Globally, there are over 14m new cancer diagnoses each year – this is set to increase to 25m per year by 2035

Around half of cancer diagnoses are among people of working age – this will increase as retirement ages extend

Just two thirds of employees with cancer have returned to work or are still working a year after diagnosis

The cost of productivity loss per premature death from cancer in the EU in 2008 was €219,241

Working people between 45-65 years are 3.66 times more likely to leave work as a result of their condition

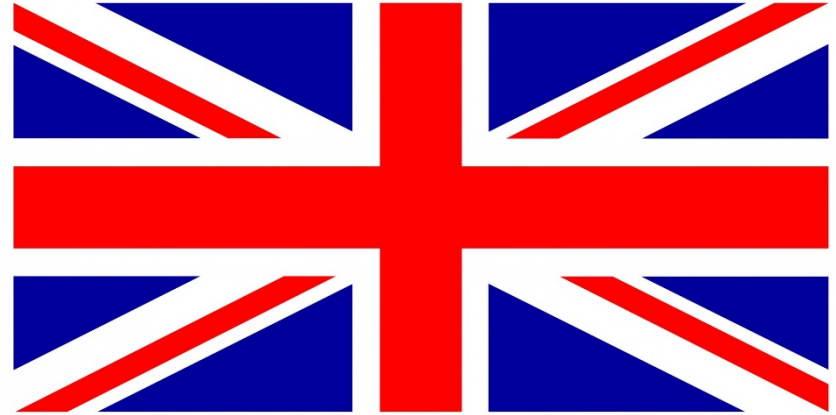
A 2009 estimate puts the total cost of cancer in the EU at €126 billion, with lost work productivity making up 50% of this

In 2008 it is estimated that at least 83m working days were lost to cancer & cancer-related illness across the EU

Cancer-related productivity losses in the EU range from €52-75 billion – about 0.6% of EU GDP

# Cancer and Work in the UK

- Approx. 2.5 to 3 million living with cancer in UK; 350,000 + diagnosed each year.
- Approx. half of working age
- Of all chronic conditions cancer has highest prevalence of work loss
- **2020 cost of cancer to GB economy £7.6bn**



# Typical work challenges for cancer survivors

1. Most don't understand their cancer, its side-effects and that recovery is non-linear
2. Many don't know if and how to talk about their cancer at work
3. Many don't understand their legal rights
4. Period after treatment can be more difficult than active treatment
5. Sickness policies including EAP programmes are often insufficient
6. Cover arrangements can create problems even when the individual is consulted.

# Typical work challenges for employers

1. Most don't understand cancer, its side-effects, and that recovery is non-linear
2. Make false comparisons and assumptions
3. Most not equipped to talk about cancer
4. Many don't understand their legal responsibilities
5. Sickness policies including EAP programmes are often insufficient
6. Cover arrangements can cause resentment amongst colleagues.

# Other key challenges

- Healthcare professionals:
  - Treat the patient but not the person.
  - Profess not to ‘understand’ the world of work.
- Colleagues: can move into ‘sympathy fatigue’
- Working carers: often unacknowledged
- Families and friends: a help and a hindrance.

# Challenges of advanced/metastatic cancer

- Life changing side effects: physical, cognitive, psychological. Persistent, invisible, fluctuating
- Uncertainty about periods of wellness. Changing treatment plans.

## **But can still work successfully with the right support**

- Employers' and colleagues' ignorance. 'Sympathy fatigue'.
- Inflexible working policies and practices.



# Recommendations

## Employers

- Implement best practice
- Upskill line managers

## Policymakers - Amend the law

- Dying to Work campaign;
- Continuing right to workplace adjustments
- Day 1 right to flexible working

## Health Professionals

- Make returning to work a clinical outcome
- Intensive training in patient communications
- Improved specialist training in cancer for OH
- Integrated care: medical team/OH/employer

# For more information about WWC

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