

WORKING WITH CANCER: THE PAST, PRESENT AND HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

For those of you who know us less well, a few words about what we do and our thoughts about improving support for all those affected by cancer in the workplace.

I set up WWC in 2013/2014 after leaving corporate life in 2012 where I had pursued a successful career as an HR Director in the City. In 2005 I had been diagnosed with Stage 2 breast cancer and in 2006 after my active treatment was finished, had set up a small campaigning group called Working With Cancer whose aim was to provide better information to HR professionals, cancer survivors, line managers and carers about how to manage work during and after active treatment. The idea came to me not because I was badly treated but because it was obvious to me then that there was an enormous gap in the UK's information and support services for people like me who had survived cancer and wanted to continue working. Even in 2005 most people assumed that cancer meant an early death or at best early retirement.

From 2006 to 2010, with the support of Professor Sir Michael Richards, Joanne Rule at CancerBackup and Ciaran Devane at Macmillan, my then colleagues and I became increasingly involved with various 'work and cancer' projects culminating in my chairing part of the National Cancer Survivorship Initiative from 2008 to 2010. I had to stand down when my day job became too demanding but could see that the original need for much better information about work and cancer had increased exponentially in line with the increasing numbers of people surviving cancer.

Since setting up the company – with the help and support of the School for Social Entrepreneurs – it has become apparent to me and my associates, most of whom have also had cancer, that although a great deal has and is being done by Macmillan, Maggie's and several other organisations to support cancer survivors and their carers in the workplace, a huge amount still needs to be done here in the UK. As we work with more and more people affected by cancer it is clear that:

- ❖ Most cancer survivors of working age want to continue working including those with advanced, metastatic cancer and many who are terminally ill.
- ❖ Finding work is particularly difficult for young people with cancer as is remaining in or returning to work for older people with cancer.
- ❖ The self-employed and those working in the 'Gig Economy' have a very tough time remaining in work and can suffer acute financial hardship as a result.
- ❖ Many cancer survivors in the UK and Northern Ireland (NI) do not know they are protected against discrimination at work by the Equality ACT 2010 (DDA 1995 in NI) and what their rights are.
- ❖ Most UK managers don't fully understand the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 (DDA 1995 NI) and their responsibilities.
- ❖ Most UK managers don't understand cancer and its significant physical and psychological impact on cancer survivors, and that there are a growing number of cancer survivors with physical, mental health and 'social' co-morbidities.

- ❖ Nor do managers understand cancer's practical and emotional impact on working carers.
- ❖ Many employers don't have a fit for purpose sickness policy for cancer survivors or an appropriate policy to support working carers.
- ❖ More importantly, employers typically don't know how many employees have/have had cancer or return to work post treatment, because they don't keep the data and our data privacy laws make this difficult to do.
- ❖ Most health care professionals treat the patient but not the person and this will continue to be an issue while remaining in or returning to work is not considered as a clinical outcome.

I could go on.....

Our aim at WWC is to provide coaching, training, consultancy and information services throughout the UK to all people affected by cancer so they can continue to lead successful and rewarding working lives. But what does that mean in terms of the wider policy changes we would like to see? Here are seven suggestions as we start 2020 most of which are relevant to all forms of chronic illness. **And do please let us have your thoughts and ideas too by contacting us via the website or via admin@workingwithcancer.co.uk**

1. Codify good practice 'work and cancer' employment policies and enforce them with appropriate employment legislation. This would include making terminal illness a protected characteristic.
2. Provide additional sick pay options for the self-employed and those forced to work part-time because of their cancer (or any other chronic illness).
3. Incentivise or compensate employers for supporting employees during treatment and return to work, for example, to subsidise temporary cover arrangements.
4. Make returning to work/being able to work a recognised clinical outcome of health interventions.
5. Encourage health professionals to treat the 'whole' person, taking a multidisciplinary approach from the outset and developing existing vocational rehabilitation services.
6. Provide more/better information for cancer patients about managing work and cancer online and in hard copy formats to be made available in hospital waiting rooms, GP surgeries, health centres etc.
7. Recognise the value of coaching, funded by Access to Work, as a means of supporting people affected by cancer to return to work.