

# MAKING IT WORK

**WE ARE  
MACMILLAN.  
CANCER SUPPORT**

How supporting people to work after cancer  
is good for business, good for the economy,  
good for people with cancer



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109,000 people of  
working age are  
diagnosed with cancer  
every year in the UK<sup>1</sup>

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# Introduction

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**Cancer is an illness that affects people in many different ways. For everyone diagnosed with the illness, it has a dramatic effect on their health, whether that's just during treatment or for the rest of their life. For many, it affects them emotionally and puts a strain on their relationships. And for those who work, it often robs them of something that is an integral part of who they are and their main source of income – their job.**

Yet Macmillan knows that this doesn't have to be the case. Many people who are working when they are diagnosed with cancer would prefer to remain in work, or return to their job, during or after treatment.

There are also many things that employers and the government can do – and should do – to help those who have had a cancer diagnosis stay in employment. This support greatly benefits employers and the government financially, and helps to keep skilled and experienced people in the UK's workforce.

So please read on about the problems people diagnosed with cancer face to keep their jobs, why supporting them so they can remain in and return to employment is hugely beneficial, and what action the government and employers can take to make this happen.

*Ciarán Devane*

**Ciarán Devane  
Macmillan Cancer Support  
Chief Executive**

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More than 4 in 10 people who are working when diagnosed have to make changes to their working lives after cancer, with almost half of those changing jobs or leaving work altogether<sup>2</sup>

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# What are the common effects of cancer that can impact on a person's working life?

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'I felt very tired when I returned to work after chemotherapy. It knocked the stuffing out of me, which was a surprise as I'm normally full of energy. I found this depressing but my employers were very supportive and allowed me lots of leeway with my working hours.'

**Jenny, Cambridgeshire**

## Physical problems

The effects of cancer and treatment can impact on people's lives in many different ways, and can affect them for weeks, months or even years after treatment has ended.

Fatigue (extreme tiredness) is a very common and frustrating problem, with 65% of cancer survivors saying that they have to deal with fatigue following treatment.<sup>3</sup>

Other significant effects caused by cancer and treatment can include pain, a reduced freedom of movement and a reduced ability to process information, apply knowledge and use judgement (cognitive functioning).

## Emotional problems

A cancer diagnosis is a devastating experience for most people and often leads to them experiencing a whole range of emotions. These may include shock, anxiety, sadness, relief, uncertainty and, for some people, depression.

In fact, more than 4 in 10 (44%) of the people we talked to who had survived cancer told us that they had become depressed at some point during their illness.<sup>3</sup>

## Practical problems

Inevitably, people who are diagnosed with cancer need to take time off from work for treatment or check-ups. Practical problems such as these can make a person's working life difficult, especially if employers aren't supportive or understanding of their needs.

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Over 700,000 people  
of working age are living  
with cancer in the UK<sup>5</sup>

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# What support is currently given to people with cancer to help them remain in or return to work?

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**The truth is that there is very little provided. Most people with cancer do not receive the help they need to remain in or return to work. The four main problems being:**

## **A lack of information and advice**

Despite there being guidance on how cancer will affect someone's working life (Macmillan produces a lot of it), many people with cancer who are considering remaining at work, returning to their job or leaving it are given little or no information and advice. Statistically, less than 40% of people are advised by health professionals about the impact cancer treatment may have on their ability to work.<sup>2</sup>

Also, there is a lack of awareness among employers of how they can support employees with cancer in the best way possible. In our recent survey of line managers, 56% said the main barrier to employees with cancer being offered support in their workplace is a lack of awareness of the needs of people with cancer.<sup>4</sup>

## **A dearth of services to help people with cancer remain in or return to work**

Vocational rehabilitation services help people with disabilities and health conditions such as cancer overcome barriers and retain or regain the ability to work. Those who are lucky enough to have access to such services find them extremely helpful. Unfortunately, there is a distinct lack of services suitable for people with cancer in the UK. For example Occupational Health (OH) services are one way of supporting cancer survivors to return to work, but only 36 percent of private sector employees have access to them.<sup>6</sup>

### **Inadequate government back-to-work programmes**

Although some programmes exist, these schemes are not sufficiently tailored to support people with cancer. Also, staff at job centres are often inadequately trained to understand the specific support that might be needed by someone who has had a cancer diagnosis. Additionally, the support these programmes offer does not extend to when people are back at work, which can be the point at which many problems arise.<sup>7</sup>

### **No knowledge of legal responsibilities**

A supportive employer can be absolutely vital in helping someone with cancer return to work. However, new research shows that the majority of employers don't know about their legal responsibilities towards people with cancer – less than half of employers know cancer is covered under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).<sup>4</sup>

Employees also have a lack of knowledge of their employers' legal obligations to them, and so may not request the support they are entitled to – less than 40 percent of people with cancer know that cancer is covered by the DDA.<sup>2</sup>

From October 2010, all disability discrimination legislation will fall under the Equality Act.



'Some employers aren't as understanding as mine are, which makes me angry. Cancer is bad enough without the boss breathing down your neck and guilt-tripping you out of a job. Money problems can also become an issue. I remember sobbing down the phone to my bank for a little bit of financial leeway until I got on my feet again. It was all to no avail.'

**Maggie, Brighton**

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£4,333 is the amount  
the Chartered Institute  
of Personnel and  
Development estimates  
it costs an employer to  
recruit a new employee<sup>8</sup>

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# Why should employers support people with cancer to continue to work?

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**If an employee is diagnosed with cancer and wants to remain in work, it's likely an employer will need to consider requests for things like flexible working hours or physical adjustments to the workplace. But taking the time to do this should not be seen as a burden. There are substantial benefits for businesses if they retain someone diagnosed with cancer or help them to return to work.**

## **Financial benefits**

- Maintain productivity by retaining valuable experience and skills.
- Avoid the cost of having to replace an employee – the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development estimates the average cost of recruitment to be £4,333 per person.<sup>8</sup>
- Save valuable time – the average time needed to recruit someone, depending on the level of the position being filled, is 6 to 16 weeks.<sup>8</sup>
- Employers who support someone with cancer can begin to develop a greater understanding of the needs of diverse groups – people who could be potential or existing customers. It's knowledge an employer could then use to access new markets and revenue. For example, the spending power of disabled people in the UK is estimated at £80 billion.<sup>9</sup>

### **Fulfilling legal obligations**

- Under the Equality Act, employers must consider requests such as flexible working hours or physical adjustments to the workplace from someone who has cancer. If they do meet these obligations, they can avoid potential discrimination charges, along with damage to their reputation, legal fees and lost time.
- In 2008, the median amount awarded to an employee due to an employer's breach of the Disability Discrimination Act (now covered by the Equality Act) was £8,000. There were also awards ranging up to nearly £500,000.<sup>10</sup>

### **Improved morale**

- Employers who support an employee with an illness such as cancer will foster a greater sense of loyalty from them and improve engagement and morale. Seeing a colleague supported in this way can also reinforce other employees' sense of fairness and trust in the organisation.

### **Positive image**

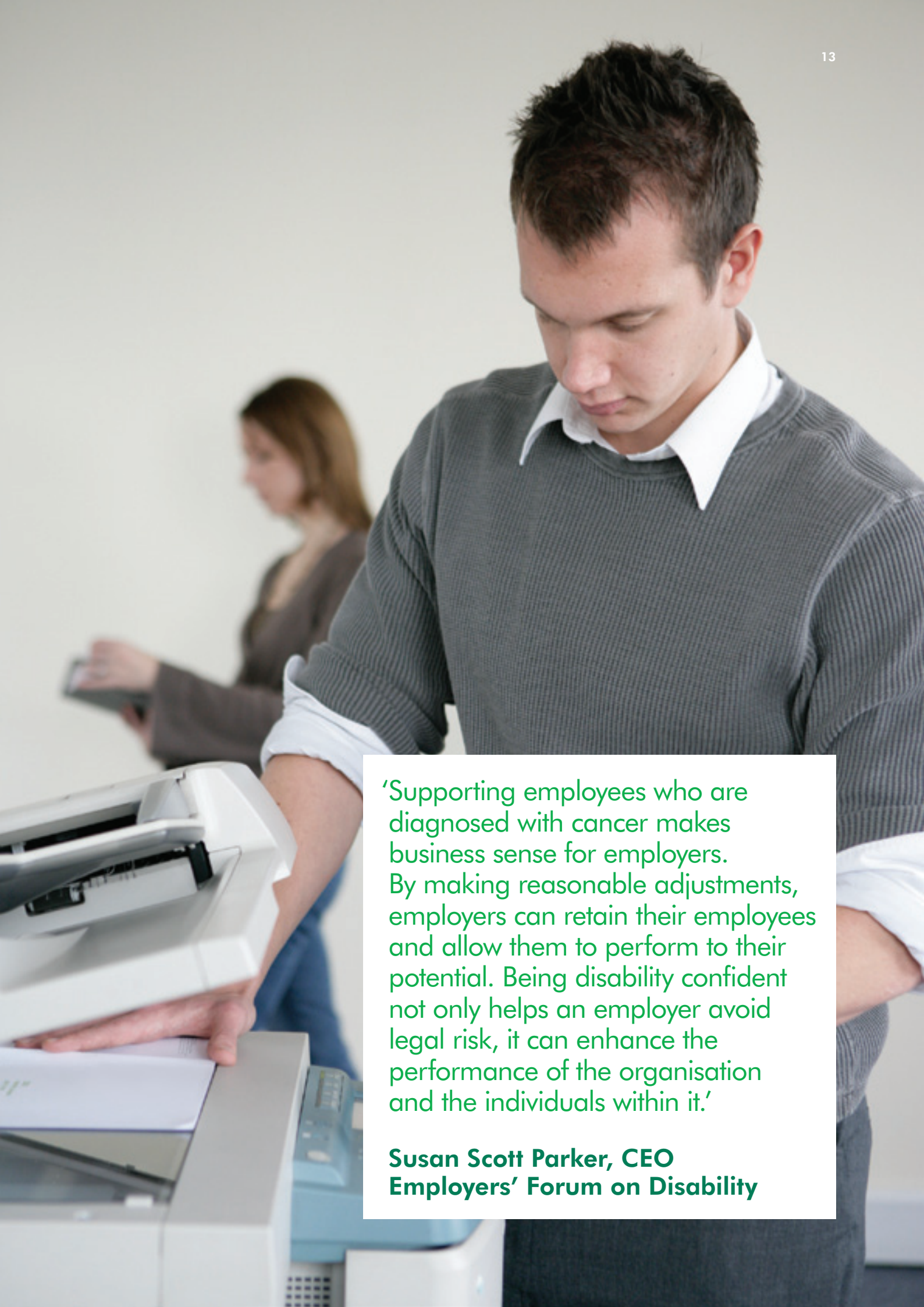
- An employer who is seen to support employees with cancer is more likely to become attractive to customers, other businesses and job applicants.

### **It's easy to be there for people with cancer**

Over 70% of organisations that make workplace adjustments to support people with disabilities consider them easy.<sup>11</sup> Many adjustments, such as flexible working hours or allowing an employee to work from home, have no cost. Those that do are often covered by grants or schemes such as the government's Access to Work scheme.

Sometimes it may take a very minor adjustment to help an employee remain in work. However, it is essential that an employer works with individual employees to develop personalised return to work plans.

Smaller businesses may find it harder to make some adjustments. But equally the cost of replacing an employee or defending a discrimination claim will hit them harder. Therefore, it's just as important that small businesses support employees diagnosed with cancer.

A man with short dark hair, wearing a grey ribbed sweater over a white collared shirt, is looking down at a white printer. His hands are on the printer. In the background, a woman with long brown hair, wearing a dark top, is blurred and appears to be looking at a tablet. The setting is a bright, modern office with a plain white wall.

'Supporting employees who are diagnosed with cancer makes business sense for employers. By making reasonable adjustments, employers can retain their employees and allow them to perform to their potential. Being disability confident not only helps an employer avoid legal risk, it can enhance the performance of the organisation and the individuals within it.'

**Susan Scott Parker, CEO  
Employers' Forum on Disability**

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In 2008, figures show that 40,000 people with cancer were receiving incapacity benefits<sup>12</sup>

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# Why should the government support people with cancer to stay in work?

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**We know the economic benefit to the UK could be huge if all the people diagnosed with cancer who were able to work could do so. Business and government would reap big rewards if people with cancer were simply offered effective back-to-work support.**

For example, economic modelling commissioned by Macmillan has shown that if just half of the breast cancer survivors who initially return to work but then leave were helped to stay in work, the economy could save £30 million every year. These savings would come from things like decreased benefits paid to patients, and an increase in income tax paid to the government.<sup>13</sup>

We think it's clear that the economic benefit to the UK would run into many millions if everyone with cancer who was able to work was supported in the right way.

## **It will cut costs for the NHS**

There is strong evidence that unemployment is generally harmful to health. It can contribute to poorer general and mental health, and higher hospital admission rates. For people who have experienced ill health or disability, remaining in or returning to work can actually help promote recovery and lead to better health outcomes.<sup>14</sup>

The kind of health problems unemployment can contribute to, like mental illness, disability and obesity, cost the NHS millions of pounds every year. This expense could be significantly cut if people with cancer were supported in the right way so they could remain in or return to work.

### **Fewer people would claim benefits and more people would pay income tax**

By helping people with cancer remain in work, fewer people would claim out-of-work benefits such as Employment and Support Allowance.


In 2008, figures show that 40,000 people with cancer were receiving incapacity benefits.<sup>12</sup>

With more people diagnosed with cancer in employment, more income tax would be paid to the government.

### **The productivity of businesses would increase**

The think tank Policy Exchange calculated that the losses suffered by businesses in 2008 due to people who survived cancer being unable to return to paid work amounted to a staggering £5.3 billion.<sup>15</sup>

With the right support, many of these people could have remained in or returned to work.



'When I was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma I resigned from my job but I still wanted to do something part-time. I went to the job centre for a review and was told I was "unemployable". I look back on that day and smile. Since then I've started working for a great company who are allowing me to build back up to full-time without any pressure.'

**Jackie, Swansea**

47% of people with cancer who informed their employer of their diagnosis did not have sick pay entitlement, flexible working conditions or work place adjustments discussed with them by their employer<sup>2</sup>

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# What needs to happen?

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**Employers** must fulfil their obligations to employees with cancer under the Equality Act. To help employers do this, we have produced an employer toolkit that can be downloaded from [www.macmillan.org.uk/work](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/work)

From this website, employers can also download a guide to the Equality Act. This identifies the disability discrimination legislation that employers must adhere to if one of their employees is diagnosed with cancer.

**The Government** must work directly with employers to raise awareness of their legal obligations under the Equality Act to support people diagnosed with cancer. They should also ensure that everyone diagnosed with cancer has appropriate back-to-work support.

It is vital that people with cancer are offered vocational rehabilitation to help them remain in or return to work. This should include services like physiotherapy, counselling, workplace assessments and advice on how to manage symptoms such as pain and fatigue.

Supporting people with cancer to remain in or return to work is the responsibility of both the Department of Health and the Department of Work and Pensions. It is essential that both departments work closely together.

**The NHS** must routinely provide return-to-work information and advice to people affected by cancer. This requires a cultural shift to get health professionals to talk to patients about the impact cancer can have on their working lives. We know it can be done.

**The Department for Work and Pensions** must ensure that the government's new Work Programme contains tailored support to meet the specific needs of people with cancer who want to work. It must also provide ongoing support once people with cancer have returned to work, as the first months back in work can be the hardest.

'I've returned to work since I was diagnosed with oesophageal cancer and I can't thank my employers enough. Throughout my treatment, surgery and recovery they offered me help and showed true understanding and friendship. Without them, I don't know what position I'd be in today.'

**Gary, Manchester**

# Footnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Cancer Research UK. Cancer incidence by age – UK statistics <http://info.cancerresearchuk.org/cancerstats/incidence/age/index.htm> (Accessed 26 August 2010). This estimate is for 15–64 year olds in 2007.
- <sup>2</sup> YouGov online survey of 1,740 UK adults living with cancer. Fieldwork took place between 26 July–9 August 2010. Survey results are unweighted.
- <sup>3</sup> Macmillan Feb 2010 online survey of 1,019 people living with cancer.
- <sup>4</sup> YouGov online survey of 2,281 UK line managers. Fieldwork was undertaken between 26 July and 9 August. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are regionally representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).
- <sup>5</sup> Maddams J, et al. Cancer prevalence in the United Kingdom: estimates for 2008. *British Journal of Cancer*. 2009. 101: 541-547 and Cancer prevalence in the UK, 2008 [http://library.ncin.org.uk/docs/080714-TCR-UK\\_prevalence.pdf](http://library.ncin.org.uk/docs/080714-TCR-UK_prevalence.pdf) (Accessed 26 August 2010). This estimate is for 18–64 year olds in 2008.
- <sup>6</sup> Health and Safety Executive. *Occupational Health Advisory Committee report and recommendations on improving access to occupational health support*, 2000. Available at [www.hse.gov.uk/aboutus/meetings/iacs/ohac/access.htm#7](http://www.hse.gov.uk/aboutus/meetings/iacs/ohac/access.htm#7) accessed May 2010.
- <sup>7</sup> *Finding a Clearer Path: Evaluation of the Pathways to Work Programme for people living with cancer*, produced for Macmillan Cancer Support by Matrix Insight, March 2010.
- <sup>8</sup> CIPD Annual Survey Report 2007, [www.aaronwallis.co.uk/CIPD%20-%20recruitretntsurv07.pdf](http://www.aaronwallis.co.uk/CIPD%20-%20recruitretntsurv07.pdf)
- <sup>9</sup> Department of Work and Pensions, 2004, using numbers of disabled adults covered by the DDA and individual Incomes data from the Family Resources Survey 2002/03, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+www.dwp.gov.uk/mediacentre/pressreleases/2004/dec/spending.asp>
- <sup>10</sup> Equal Opportunities Review, Compensation Awards 2008: Part 2, Issue 190, 07/07/2009, <http://www.eortrial.co.uk/default.aspx?id=1116328>
- <sup>11</sup> Organisations' Responses to the Disability Discrimination Act, Simm C, Aston J, Williams C, Hill D, Bellis A, Meager N. Research Report DWPRR 410, Department for Work and Pensions, 2007.
- <sup>12</sup> Sourced from the DWP website's tabulation tool in 2008, [http://83.244.183.180/100pc/ibsd/ibdgp/beneficiary/a\\_carate\\_r\\_icdgp\\_c\\_beneficiary\\_nov08.html](http://83.244.183.180/100pc/ibsd/ibdgp/beneficiary/a_carate_r_icdgp_c_beneficiary_nov08.html)
- <sup>13</sup> Demonstrating the Economic Value of Co-ordinated Cancer Services: An examination of resource utilisation in Manchester, Macmillan Cancer Support, March 2010, [www.macmillan.org.uk/Aboutus/Healthprofessionals/Cancer\\_care\\_research/MonitorResearchinManchester-costeffectivecare.aspx](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/Aboutus/Healthprofessionals/Cancer_care_research/MonitorResearchinManchester-costeffectivecare.aspx)
- <sup>14</sup> Gordon Waddell, A Kim Burton, Is Work Good for Your Health and Wellbeing? 2006.
- <sup>15</sup> Policy Exchange, Henry Featherstone & Lilly Whitham, The Cost of Cancer, Research Note, February 2010.



If you have any questions about cancer, ask Macmillan.  
If you need support, ask Macmillan.  
Or if you just want someone to talk to, ask Macmillan.  
Our cancer support specialists are here for everyone  
affected by cancer, whatever you need.

Call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**,  
Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm

**[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)**

We have an interpretation service in over 200 languages.  
Just state, in English, the language you wish to use when you call.

If you are deaf or hard of hearing, you can use our textphone service  
on **0808 808 0121**, or the Text Relay system.

Contact **the campaigns team**,  
email **[campaigns@macmillan.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@macmillan.org.uk)**  
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