

A guide for employers

Summary of key Macmillan research

**WE ARE
MACMILLAN.
CANCER SUPPORT**

**WORKING
THROUGH
CANCER**



Appendix 1: Summary of key Macmillan research

The Macmillan Research Unit (MRU) at the University of Manchester is studying return to work after cancer treatment.

The unit, led by MRU director Dr Ziv Amir, began in 2005 by conducting a comprehensive review of the scientific literature on the subject. The researchers also surveyed 284 people with cancer and followed up by interviewing 41 of these people in greater depth.¹¹ Here are some of their key findings:

- Many people with cancer are keen to 'get back to normal' and being at work is an important part of achieving this goal.
- There is a lack of suitable medical advice to help people understand the impact on their working lives, and to help them return to work at the right time.
- Employers have a vital role to play. A good relationship with an employer or line manager increases the likelihood of a successful return to work.
- People who are able to have a phased return to work find this very helpful.

Dr Amir's team researched the experiences, views and needs of line managers. In general, line managers are more likely to take a supportive and positive attitude towards staff with cancer. Negative or unsupportive attitudes are less common. They feel they shoulder too much responsibility on their own – for example, in managing attendance. They do not think these difficulties are always recognised by more senior managers. Finally, line managers say they need more advice and guidance.

We asked line managers about their experiences of working with people affected by cancer. They told researchers that support and direction from senior management is often lacking.

Line managers reported difficulty dealing with the emotional issues that arose, and striking a balance between the needs of the individual and those of the organisation. They said they would appreciate training and improved internal communications.

In other research funded by Macmillan, occupational health professionals reported that line managers are often supportive of employees affected by cancer. However, many felt that communication between occupational health professionals and line managers was not always clear.¹²

¹¹ Amir Z., Neary D. & Luker K. Cancer survivors' views of work 3 years post diagnosis: a UK Perspective. *European Journal of Oncology Nursing*. July 2008; 12(3): 190-7.

¹² Amir Z, Wynn P, Whitaker S, Luker K. Cancer survivorship and return to work: UK occupational physician experience. *Occupational Medicine*. London. December 2008. (Advance access).