

# A guide for employers

Introduction

**WE ARE  
MACMILLAN.  
CANCER SUPPORT**

**WORKING  
THROUGH  
CANCER**



Each year over 100,000 people of working age are diagnosed with cancer in the UK.<sup>1</sup> There are currently over 700,000 people of working age living with a cancer diagnosis.<sup>2</sup> Macmillan provides the information and support people need to remain in, or return to work. We also advise employers and offer resources such as this guide, to help you when a member of staff, or their close family member, is diagnosed with cancer.

Macmillan sponsors a continuing research programme to identify the needs of people affected by cancer and their employers. Ultimately, we aim to develop and test an effective model for supporting people with cancer when they return to work. For more information, please visit [macmillan.org.uk/work](https://macmillan.org.uk/work)

This guide is based on revised content from two publications: *Macmillan's Working through cancer – a guide for employers* and *Cancerbackup's Cancer and working – guidelines for employers, HR and line managers* (produced in association with the Working with Cancer Group and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)).

The information provided in this booklet is designed to give examples of good practice and is a general guide to your employees' rights and your responsibilities as an employer. It is not a substitute for legal advice. If you need more details on employee rights, or legal advice, please contact a solicitor. While we endeavour to provide information of the highest quality, Macmillan will not accept any liability for the use, or inability to use any information provided in this booklet.

<sup>1</sup> Office for National Statistics. Registrations of cancer diagnosed in 2003. Cancer statistics registrations. England. 2005.

<sup>2</sup> King's College London, Macmillan Cancer Support, and National Cancer Intelligence Network. Cancer prevalence in the UK. 2008.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>page 2</b>
Foreword	page 4
Benefits of best practice	page 6
How to use this guide	page 7
<b>Section 1: How cancer affects people</b>	<b>page 8</b>
What is cancer?	page 8
Emotions	page 9
Fatigue	page 9
Effects of treatment	page 10
If your employee is a carer	page 10
<b>Section 2: How to talk about cancer</b>	<b>page 12</b>
Guidelines on sensitive communication	page 12
First conversations	page 13
Telling colleagues	page 14
<b>Section 3: Workplace support strategies</b>	<b>page 15</b>
Options for time off	page 15
Keeping in touch	page 17
The role of occupational health	page 17
Return-to-work options	page 18
Reasonable adjustments	page 20
Leaving work	page 21
Bereavement	page 22
<b>Section 4: Personal finances</b>	<b>page 23</b>
Impact of employment changes	page 23
Sources of advice	page 23
Additional Macmillan resources	page 24
<b>Section 5: Legislation</b>	<b>page 25</b>
Equality Act 2010	page 25
Carers' rights	page 26
Confidentiality	page 27
<b>Section 6: How Macmillan can help</b>	<b>page 30</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Summary of key Macmillan research</b>	<b>page 31</b>
<b>Appendix 2: A to Z of further sources of information and advice</b>	<b>page 32</b>

# The health of your employees is vital to the health of your business

A successful return-to-work after cancer is in everyone's interests. Macmillan has developed this guide to help. We hope you find it useful.



In the UK, over 100,000 people of working age are diagnosed with cancer each year. The HR department of a large employer will see more new cancer diagnoses in a

year than a GP. More than 700,000 people of working age are living with a cancer diagnosis. Many will continue to work after, or even through their treatment for cancer. They need to work to earn a living and they want to work because to do so is 'normal'. And of course like many others, people with cancer often have a strong attachment to their work.

At Macmillan, we know that employers play a pivotal role in supporting people with cancer and their carers. We also know that a good relationship between an employer and employee is also more likely to lead to a successful return-to-work. This is particularly important because, outside the workplace, it is still unusual for someone with cancer to receive advice about employment from occupational health or rehabilitation services.

As an employer or line manager, you may not always feel confident about how best to support an employee who is affected by cancer. There are challenges at the time of diagnosis, during treatment, at the time of return-to-work and afterwards. This is true for all employers, but a particular problem for smaller companies, which often lack the support of in-house occupational

health expertise. We also recognise that you need to meet the needs of other individuals in the workplace, and your organisation as a whole.

In these difficult situations, you are also affected yourself, both on a practical and a personal level. This guide offers you support in managing the impact of cancer on your employee, your staff and your business.

There are many straightforward steps you can take. For example, the simplest and easiest way you can help staff members with cancer is to plan their return-to-work carefully with them. Reasonable adjustments such as flexible working arrangements and a phased return-to-work can ease the transition back to work, when people are still dealing with the physical and emotional effects of cancer and its treatment.

The health of your employees is vital to the health of your business and a successful return-to-work after cancer is in everyone's interests. Macmillan has developed this guide to help. We hope you find it useful.

*Ciarán Devane*

Ciarán Devane  
Chief Executive  
Macmillan Cancer Support

# More people than ever are surviving after a diagnosis of cancer

Treatments for cancer are improving all the time and survival rates have doubled over the past 30 years. Nearly half of people diagnosed with cancer now survive for 10 years or more.<sup>3</sup>

According to international research, 6 in 10 people with cancer now return to work.<sup>4</sup> This trend means that colleagues, managers and employers are also increasingly likely to face cancer in the workplace. However, people who have finished treatment tell Macmillan they have difficulties returning to normal life, including work. For many people, this is a new experience and they are not sure how to handle it.

Cancer affects not only the person with the diagnosis, but also their family and close friends. When they are in work, carers have to balance the demands of the job with the needs of a loved one who is going through, or recovering from treatment.

Macmillan is responding to help people through these challenges. We are working with employers, government departments and medical and HR professionals to develop and test solutions to help employees return to work after a cancer diagnosis. People affected by cancer are key contributors to this process. Macmillan also provides a wide range of information resources on many issues, including employment (see 'Publications' on page 28).

<sup>3</sup> Cancer Research UK. Press release: Vision for 2020 launched as ten-year survival for cancer doubles in 30 years. 2007. Available at: <http://info.cancerresearchuk.org/news/archive/pressreleases/2007/may/322682> Accessed May 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Spelten E, Sprangers M, Verbeek J. Factors reported to influence the return to work of cancer survivors: a literature review. *Psycho-Oncology*. 2002; 11: 124-131

# Benefits of best practice

Supporting employees so they can remain at work – or return when they are ready – has benefits for all concerned.

For employers, it means:

- reducing replacement, recruitment and induction costs, plus the associated management time
- retaining knowledge and experience
- helping managers support their teams more effectively
- building trust and loyalty with employees
- enhancing your reputation as a good employer.

Cancer is covered by the Equality Act 2010 and understanding best practice will help you meet your obligations as an employer under this legislation (see page 25).

For employees, a supportive approach from employers can reduce anxiety and provide the skills and confidence to deal with cancer at work. Research commissioned by Macmillan has shown that a good relationship with the employer and a phased return-to-work are two important predictors of a successful adjustment back to work.<sup>5</sup>

There is huge diversity among employers and it is obvious that one approach will not fit all situations. For example, small businesses employ 58% of the private sector workforce.<sup>6</sup> If this applies to your company, you may not have easy-access to occupational health or HR expertise. Circumstances differ if you are a rural or urban employer, in the public or private sector, and so on. However, there are common principles of good practice that should work for everyone.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> Federation of Small Businesses website. [www.fsb.org.uk](http://www.fsb.org.uk). Accessed March 2009.

# How to use this guide

This guide aims to help you understand what your employee is experiencing and points out ways that you can support them. It provides practical tips to minimise the impact on your organisation and all individuals concerned.

The guide is divided into six main sections:

1. How cancer affects people, physically and emotionally
- 2 How to talk about cancer
- 3 Strategies to support employees affected by cancer and their co-workers
- 4 Impact on personal finances
- 5 Legislation, including the Equality Act 2010, and the rights of carers
- 6 How Macmillan can help.

At the end of each section, you will find additional resources, in case you need more details or advice.

Depending on your organisation's communication mechanisms, you may want to consider a training event as one way of disseminating this information to managers throughout your organisation. If someone on your team is affected by cancer right now, with their agreement, you might decide to go through this guide with their line manager and the employee themselves on a one-to-one basis.

An increasing number of employers have formal policies for people with cancer and/or carers. If you already have a policy, you may want to revisit it in light of this guide. Alternatively, your organisation may have broader policies that can be applied to people with cancer and/or carers. You can also access Macmillan's 'Cancer in the workplace' policy, Macmillan's 'Carers' policy and a 'Model cancer policy/template' (see below).

These guidelines form part of a larger toolkit which pools resources and guidelines for employers, HR and line managers. The toolkit also offers support and information to employees affected by cancer.

The toolkit comprises:

- *Work and cancer* booklet for employees
- *Working while caring for someone with cancer* booklet for employees who are carers
- Macmillan's *Cancer in the workplace* policy
- Model cancer policy/template
- Macmillan's buddying guidelines for HR teams.

These resources are available as downloadable pdfs in the 'working through cancer' section of our website [macmillan.org.uk/work](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/work)

*Cancer in the Workplace* DVD (developed in partnership with the Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives). This resource shows different scenarios of people who are affected by cancer in the workplace and the issues that this raises for them (the DVD scenarios are available in the 'working through cancer' section of our website [macmillan.org.uk/work](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/work) ).

The Macmillan helpline can provide emotional support to line managers and employees, as well as putting them in touch with other sources of information and support, freephone **0808 808 00 00**, (9am–8pm, Mon–Fri).