

# Working through Cancer Parliamentary Briefing

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CANCER SUPPORT**

## Back to work support for cancer patients is inadequate

Although most people with cancer want to remain in, or return to work, during or after their treatment cancer survivors are 1.4 times more likely to be unemployed than the general population.

The new Government want to “get Britain working again” however the current support to remain in, or return to, work is failing the 700,000 people of working age living with cancer in the UK.

The think tank Policy Exchange calculates the total loss in productivity of cancer survivors unable to return to paid work to be £5.3billion. The Government cannot afford to ignore the potential benefits to the wider economy of enabling cancer survivors to remain in, or return to, work if they so wish.

*Macmillan wants to ensure that all people living with and beyond cancer are adequately support to remain in, or get back to, work if they wish to.*

There are three main barriers that people diagnosed with cancer face in remaining in or returning to work:

1. A lack of information and advice
2. Serious gaps in back to work support:
  - a) A lack of vocational rehabilitation services
  - b) Inappropriate Government work programmes
3. A lack of employers' awareness employers of their legal responsibilities to staff with cancer

## 1. Lack of information and advice on work

Cancer survivors experience significant effects of treatment that will impact on their ability to work yet less than 50% of patients are advised by cancer doctors about this.

The physical, emotional and practical effects of cancer and its treatment can continue and develop months and years on following treatment.

*“Proper advice rather than just sick notes would have helped make this a less stressful and intimidating experience”. Joanne, Yorkshire*

People with cancer should be informed of how their cancer or its treatment will affect their ability to work; how to manage or accommodate their symptoms; when they might be ready to go back to work and their rights under anti-discrimination legislation. This can be included in information prescriptions, and in post-treatment assessments and care plans.

*Macmillan wants information about working through, or returning to work after, treatment for cancer to be routinely provided by the NHS.*

## 2. Serious gaps in return to work support:

### A lack of vocational rehabilitation (VR) services

VR helps people with cancer retain and regain the ability to work, and overcome barriers to returning to work. VR services can include physiotherapy, counselling, retraining, employee advocacy, and workplace assessments or adjustments.

Most NHS rehabilitation professionals do not have the capacity to do more than hospital discharge planning for people in work who have cancer. Macmillan is currently piloting this model of early intervention with the Department of Health to support cancer survivors to remain in or return to their existing jobs.

*Macmillan wants VR to be offered to every cancer patient that needs it.*

### Government work programmes are often inappropriate

Macmillan welcomes the Government's proposal to offer targeted, personalised support to help people back to work. The 'Pathways to Work' programme wasn't sufficiently tailored to the needs of people with cancer e.g. the Condition Management Programme (CMP) should include information on pain management, and be more suited to people who are 'job ready'. It should offer ongoing support once participants have started work as the first months back can be the hardest.

*Macmillan wants the new Work Programme to offer tailored programmes to meet the specific needs of people with cancer and provide in-work support.*

## 3. Employers don't know their legal responsibilities to their staff

Macmillan has launched its *Working through cancer* campaign to raise employers' awareness of their legal responsibilities towards staff with cancer: currently less than 50% know. Since October the Equality Act 2010 replaced the Disability Discrimination Act, adding extra urgency to the need to promote awareness.

70% of line managers say they need more information and guidance on cancer to support their employees. Macmillan has developed a package of support for employers including a cancer-specific guide to the Equality Act 2010 and 'Working through cancer: An employer's guide'.

*Only 47% of people with cancer say their employer discussed sick pay entitlement, flexible working conditions, or workplace adjustments when they informed them of their diagnosis.*

*Macmillan hopes MPs will support their constituents with cancer by writing to local employers to inform them of the Equality Act and what it means for staff with cancer.*

### What can Parliamentarians do to help?

Macmillan needs champions in Parliament willing to raise these issues through PQs, debates and letters to Ministers. We would welcome advice and guidance on how to ensure employees with cancer are supported to remain in, and return to, work.

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