

# How to write a cancer policy

## QUICK GUIDE



PAM OH Solutions



**Someone in the UK is now diagnosed with cancer every 90 seconds. A cancer policy can not only help you meet your legal responsibilities, but also offer a caring and consistent approach to those affected.**

Before writing your policy, remember that many people with a cancer diagnosis want to be able to continue to work and contributing to society. Improved treatments for cancer also mean that more and more people are learning to live with this as a chronic, rather than terminal, illness.

Your policy should outline how you will respect

the employee's dignity and privacy and make reasonable adjustments to support their recovery and ability to remain in work.

It should also explain how you will support them should they wish to give up work or become too sick to work due to a terminal diagnosis.

## Five things to include in your cancer policy

### 1. Opening statement

This will set the tone for your policy and organisation's overall approach. You could say:

*We are committed to fostering an inclusive and supportive working environment for all our staff. We recognise that many members of staff will experience cancer and believe we have a clear duty to help and support those with a cancer diagnosis.*

*The purpose of this policy is to raise awareness of how we can support those with cancer to remain in work, and to encourage open conversations between managers and staff. We are committed to supporting employees who are affected by a cancer diagnosis with reasonable workplace adjustments and additional support and information.*

## 2. First Conversation

Explain who the employee can first approach following a diagnosis and the options for having a confidential and supportive first conversation with their line-manager, HR or occupational health. Offer different options and the opportunity for the employee to bring a friend or colleague along.

Ask the employee who they would like to know about their diagnosis and what they would like to be said. They should be asked for permission to approach and obtain advice from occupational health about their condition and any recommendations for supporting them to stay in work.

Set out what the employee's rights are under the disability provisions of the Equality Act (see below) and what sick leave, sick pay, flexible working and return to work policies are in place. Also provide information on any occupational health, private medical insurance and counselling they can access.

## 3. Cancer and disability

Everyone with cancer is automatically classified as disabled under the disability provisions of the Equality Act (EQ 2010), meaning it is unlawful for them to be discriminated against. This means employers are legally obliged to work with employees affected by cancer to make 'reasonable adjustments' that allow them to stay in work. What is considered reasonable will depend on:

- the cost of making the adjustment
- the amount of benefit for the employee
- the practicality of making the adjustment
- the impact on the employer's business

Explain how you will go about making these adjustments and what long-term disability benefits you offer. Alternatively, the employee might be eligible for Access to Work funding, to repay up to 80% of the costs of special help needed due to their disability.



## 4. Working during treatment

Outline the options for continuing to work during treatment and any subsequent recovery period, either on a full or part-time basis. Reasonable adjustments to be considered include:

- Planning a reduced or more flexible work schedule
- Changing the hours of work to avoid rush hour travel and allow short rest breaks
- Arranging 'light duties' and asking colleagues to support relocating some work
- Adjusting performance targets to allow for effects of fatigue and sick leave
- Allowing the individual to work from home and what IT is needed to support this
- Deciding how best to keep in touch with the employee while they are on sick leave
- Arrange a 'work buddy' to keep the employee up-to-date on key developments
- Scheduling regular conversations with the employee to discuss any issues

Also bear in mind that even after the initial treatment is over, this might have given rise to new health concerns. Breast cancer treatment may have triggered the menopause while other treatments may have given rise to MSK issues that the employee will need further support with.

An occupational health advisor can liaise with the individual and their manager, to identify what is appropriate for both, and help the individual manage their symptoms and signpost them towards appropriate health or counselling services in place. They can even help with 'prehabilitation' to help the employee improve fitness and lifestyle to speed up recovery after cancer treatment.

## 5. Giving up work

If the employee wants to give up work, or is unable or unwilling to continue working, explain the financial implications of this. In certain cases, they may be entitled to receive a company, ill-health or early retirement pension. Outline the options and need for them to take proper advice before making the decision to leave paid work, either temporarily or permanently.

If the employee is diagnosed as terminally ill, outline any policies in place to support them with writing a will, arranging a power of attorney or any pension or death payments their dependents might be entitled to. You should also explain how you will support them with the range of emotions they are likely to experience, from anger to depression.

Also explain how you will support employees who are indirectly affected by cancer. Primary carers have the right to 'reasonable emergency leave' which may be paid or unpaid at the company's discretion. Where a dependant is critically ill, family leave may be taken to:

- Make emergency or longer-term care arrangements
- Deal with the death of a dependent
- Deal with an unexpected disruption or breakdown in care arrangements

Colleagues and managers may also need emotional support and counselling in the increasingly unlikely event that someone's cancer treatment is not successful.

Source: [Cancer and Working Guidelines for Employers, HR and Line Managers, Macmillian](#)

## Need more help to write your cancer policy?

PAM OH can help you to support employees affected by a cancer diagnosis, by helping you to put in place appropriate support services, education and policies. Our cancer support services include:

- ✓ **Policy writing** – professional occupational health policy writing service to help you create a bespoke cancer policy tailored to the needs of your particular organisation and workplace risks.
- ✓ **Cancer risk-assessment** – to identify what additional risks the employee might now be vulnerable to, such as compromised immunity or increased risk of fatigue, and how to plan for these.
- ✓ **Prehabilitation** – case management to help the employee improve their fitness and lifestyle before cancer treatment, or surgery, to speed up recovery time afterwards.
- ✓ **Occupational health assessment** – to identify how the individual's symptoms are impacting them individually at work to suggest coping strategies and recommended adjustments to work.
- ✓ **Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)** – confidential telephone access to mental health counsellors providing emotional support and practice advice on cancer related issues.
- ✓ **Manager workshops** – practical sessions to educate managers about cancer and how it can impact on people at work and their role in supporting those who want to stay in work.

If you would like to discuss supporting a member of staff affected by cancer at your organisation, please email us on:



PAM.academy@people-am.com