ReleasePotential

Managing a workforce that is positive about disability

Research has shown that disabled staff who have told their manager about their impairment and received the appropriate support are among the happiest in the workforce. By contrast, those who haven't are among the least content.

NHSGGC wants to promote an environment where staff feel able to tell their managers about their disability and where managers understand the benefits of developing a workplace culture that is supportive to disabled people.

What the Law says

A person has a disability that is covered by the Equality Act 2010 if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

It is important to note that the definition can cover illnesses and conditions which some people may not immediately think of as a disability, such as asthma, depression, cancer, heart disease or diabetes.

Why do we need to do more?

A recent report on the NHS Scotland workforce revealed that only 0.5% of the NHS Scotland workforce considered themselves disabled, a statistic matched by NHSGGC's workforce data. This was concerning, given that 1 in 5 of the working age population in Scotland is disabled.

However, a recent anonymous NHSGGC staff survey showed that 21% of respondents considered themselves disabled. This indicates that staff are not choosing to declare their disability status and are already in our workforce in significant numbers.

Prejudice, stigma and negative attitudes against disabled people are still common and this is recognised in equality law. Workplace cultures can lead to disabled people being less likely to reveal their 'disability status' at work. This means they are not able to realise their full potential as they don't receive the support they need from employers. They become afraid to ask for help that would benefit both them and their employer.

Ensuring that disabled staff have the support they need to do their jobs effectively has a significant and positive effect on -

- **Physical and mental health**
- **Self-esteem**
- **Attendance**
- **Professional development**
- **Team dynamics**

In your role as a manager do you know how to support disabled staff or staff with long-term conditions? Individual cases will differ hugely, so it's important you know about the range of adjustments that can be made to ensure your staff member can continue to work to their fullest potential. These can range from revised working hours to physical aids and equipment.

Fear of prejudice is especially prevalent for those with mental health issues but can apply to any impairment, especially if it is not apparent. Mental health is now the most common reason for workplace absence. A lack of understanding of mental health and the effect it can have on daily life can mean that staff do not feel able to discuss the difficulties they are having with their managers

Carol's story - Carol was recently diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Her condition required that she take medication at 10pm three times a week. Unfortunately, the associated side effects meant that Carol was too unwell to work a night shift after taking her medication.

Rather than disclose this information, Carol stopped taking her medication when she was required to work at night.

Finally, Carol discussed her situation with her manager, who was able to adjust her shift patterns accordingly, thus allowing Carol to resume her recommended regime.

If Carol was a member of your team, would she have felt comfortable disclosing her impairment? Or would the fear of the associated stigma or negative attitudes have prevented her from being open? What kind of culture exists in your department? Any of us could develop an impairment at any time in our working lives. If you were Carol, would you have been happy to disclose?

Elaine's story - Elaine suffers from depression and had a recurring pattern of low mood during or after a week of night shifts, despite regular antidepressant treatment. Elaine's manager arranged to restrict her from night shift which stabilised her condition for a period of time. Unfortunately, she then had further relapses.

Given her illness, Elaine lagged behind in terms of competencies required, including exams which precipitated anxiety. Elaine, her management team and training director agreed on reducing her working time, which extended time for her training. This had a positive impact on her anxiety and generally self confidence. She managed to pass her exam and bring her competencies up to date.

Do you know enough about mental health to be able to support your staff? Do you know where to get support and training? Often the simplest changes can make a huge difference to someone's ability to deal with their working day. Similarly, ignoring mental health issues can lead to a disproportionately negative impact on someone's working life.

What happens now? - Over the coming months, we will be promoting the importance of a workplace culture which supports disabled colleagues and encouraging staff to disclose any disabilities if they haven't already done so. It is therefore vital that all managers are aware of the actions and attitude required should a member of their team choose to do so. Managers should not make assumptions about disability or underestimate the capabilities and contribution of disabled people and people with long-term health conditions

On the 'Release Potential' page on Staffnet, you will find information on where to go for advice, resources and training.

For expert, free & confidential advice on occupational health, sickness absence, disability discrimination, Equality Act and health & safety, contact the Healthy Working Lives Advice Line on *0800 019 2211* or see their website.

NHSGGC's Occupational Health Team can also provide advice and assistance on specific cases, including recommended adjustments and funding for equipment. You can contact them on *0141 201 5674.*

Social Model of Disability

The social model of disability says that disability is caused by the way society is organised, rather than by a person's impairment or difference. It looks at ways of removing barriers that restrict life choices for disabled people. When barriers are removed, disabled people can be independent and equal in society, with choice and control over their own lives.