

Absence Management

How to 8: Support an employee who has a serious or terminal illness

Advice for line managers

Contents:	Page
Introduction	1
Guidance for managers	1
Preparing for a discussion with the employee	2

Introduction

This guide helps you when managing an employee who is seriously or terminally ill.

Guidance for managers

Being diagnosed with a serious or terminal illness can have a devastating impact. The employee not only has to come to terms with their illness and the effect it will have on their life, they may also have to make some difficult decisions about work.

For some, this may mean making temporary changes, but for others the changes may be permanent or they may have to give up work altogether.

You may be unsure about how to approach an employee who has been diagnosed with a serious or terminal illness. This guidance will support you in having those difficult conversations.

The relationship between you and the employee is very important. Establishing a rapport based on trust, support and respect for the employee's dignity will help to make these discussions easier for you both.

Other sources of support are also available and you are advised to make contact with the HR Team.

Preparing for a discussion with the employee

Below are some suggestions to help you prepare for your discussions with the employee.

Issue	Things to consider
<p>Prepare: Take time to think about the issues that might come up during the meeting.</p>	<p>Think about what the employee might ask and what you need to tell them.</p> <p>Gather as much information as possible about the options and the relevant policies and procedures such as Absence Management and Sick Pay. Take copies for the employee with you.</p>
<p>Consider emotions: This may be a difficult time for the employee, for you and other colleagues. People will react differently to a diagnosis of a serious or terminal illness. They may be calm, angry, tearful, confused, resentful or in denial.</p>	<p>Be prepared for the employee to express their emotions. Think about how you might respond.</p> <p>Be aware of and acknowledge your own emotions. Support is available from many sources, including colleagues, your manager and the HR Team.</p> <p>Remember other colleagues may also be affected. Support is available from a number of sources, including yourself and the HR Team.</p>
<p>Act promptly and sensitively:</p>	<p>Don't be tempted to delay difficult conversations. Not acting promptly could lead to the employee feeling isolated and unsupported.</p>
<p>Be informed: It may be helpful to learn more about the employee's illness or condition.</p>	<p>Having a better understanding of the employee's condition can help you support the employee. Don't make assumptions about the impact of an employee's condition or treatment.</p> <p>Take advice from Occupational Health about how the condition might affect the employee and the implications for returning/continuing to work.</p> <p>Some charities provide useful information on the impact of certain conditions on work.</p>

<p>Arrangements: Where possible, accommodate the employee's requests about when and where you have these conversations.</p>	<p>Think about: Where the meeting will be held. Meeting in the workplace is preferable but the employee may not be well enough to do so. You may agree to meet at the employee's home or another suitable location.</p> <p>Who will be present? The employee might want a family member, colleague or trade union representative to accompany them during the discussion. Whenever possible you will treat these requests sympathetically.</p> <p>Consider whether it would be helpful to take a note taker so you can focus on the discussion with the employee. If you do, tell the employee who you are taking beforehand and make sure they are comfortable with this.</p>
<p>Confidentiality:</p>	<p>Ask the employee what they want colleagues to be told about their condition and respect their wishes.</p>
<p>Discuss the options: An employee who has a serious or terminal illness may want to discuss all the options available to them.</p> <p>The options may depend upon:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the prognosis • whether a return to work is likely • business needs • the Absence Management policy and procedures. You will need to establish the business view on each option – a discussion with your senior manager/HR Team will help. 	<p>You should be prepared to discuss all the options.</p> <p>Options could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Returning to/remaining at work. For some people, focusing on work may help them to cope with their diagnosis. They may wish to consider changing their working pattern to help them cope with the effects of their condition at work or to enable them to spend more time with their family. Occupational Health can advise on any changes you need to make to the way the employee does their job because of their condition. • Remaining in employment. An employee on sick absence with a terminal diagnosis may prefer to remain in employment. You need to be prepared to discuss the financial impact of death in service for the employee's family. The Pensions website

	<p>has more information and guidance. You will also need to consider whether the business is able to continue to support the absence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ending their employment. For some employees, a return to work is not feasible or within a timeframe the business can continue to support. A decision may need to be taken by the employee and/or the business whether to end their employment. There are a number of options: ill-Health Retirement. dismissal <p>Each option will have different financial implications for the employee and their family. You will need to be prepared to discuss these so that the employee can make an informed decision. Make sure that you take the relevant information with you or are able to tell the employee where they can get information.</p> <p>Each option must be considered and followed in accordance with the relevant policy e.g. Ill Health Retirement, Absence Management policies.</p>
<p>Time out: You may need more than one discussion.</p>	<p>It may not be possible to deal with everything in one meeting. This might be because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the employee is not well enough to sit through a long discussion there may be too much information for the employee to take in they may find it too difficult emotionally you need to gather more information to answer the employee's questions.
<p>Consider drawing up an action plan:</p>	<p>An action plan may be useful to remind you to gather information the employee may need to help them make important decisions about the future.</p>

<p>This will help you to focus on what you need to do before and after the meeting.</p>	<p>The plan should record actions you or the employee need to take.</p> <p>Record when and how the next contact will take place.</p>
<p>HR Team</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The HR Team can support you, the employee, and colleagues during this difficult time.