Session 2: Working with chronic musculoskeletal conditions – report to plenary session

Anthony Woolf, Global Alliance for Musculoskeletal Health
Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are the greatest cause of disability in working age adults.

A wide variety of problems affect people’s musculoskeletal system associated with chronic pain and impaired physical function:

- Neck pain
- Back pain
- Sciatica
- Fibromyalgia
- Osteoarthritis
- Osteoporosis
- Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Gout

Inflammatory diseases, ageing, congenital or developmental, trauma, injuries (sports, occupational).

Although not caused by work, they impact on people’s ability to work and many leave the labour market.

The impact in the workplace is increasing with ageing workforces with more people leaving the labour market.
Working with chronic musculoskeletal conditions

- Research programme considered the challenges and what needs to be done
- Lighten the Load campaign has prioritised working with chronic MSDs

Healthy Workplaces Lighten the Load 2020-22

Chronic conditions
Facts and figures
Future generations
Prevention
Prevention
Sedentary work
Telework
Worker diversity
Session 2: Working with Chronic Musculoskeletal Conditions

Speakers

- Working with chronic MSDs - results of EU-OSHA case studies: Sarah Copsey, EU-OSHA:
- Micro-exercise at the workplace: Lars L Andersen, Danish Working Environment Authority
- Early intervention for rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases to reduce work disability – the Spanish experience: Lydia Abásolo, Departamento de Investigación de la UGC Reumatología, Hospital Clínico San Carlos Madrid, Spain:

Position statements and views on working with chronic MSDs

- European Commission, DG EMPLY: Monika Chaba
- Global Alliance for Musculoskeletal Health (G-MUSC): Anthony Woolf, Co-Chair
- Societal Impact of Pain (SIP): Patrice Forget, Committee member,
- People with Arthritis/Rheumatism across Europe (Eular Pare): Souzi Makri, Chair
- International Federation of Physical Therapists working in Occupational Health and Ergonomics (IFPTOHE): Yvonne van Zaanen, Vice President

Panel discussion – the way forward on working with chronic MSDs

(Biographies Healthy Workplaces Lighten the Load (healthy-workplaces.eu))
Working with Chronic Musculoskeletal Conditions

It is a shared responsibility of all members of society to enable people with chronic MSDs to participate in healthy and sustainable work.

It requires a multifactored, multidisciplinary approach –
- the employer and managers,
- the employee,
- experts in occupational health and
- the healthcare team
working together with a common goal of enabling people to remain in work.
Key messages

▪ You do not have to be 100% fit to work and good work is good for people with chronic MSDs.
▪ Disability in people with chronic MSDs can be prevented or reduced through timely access to appropriate management.
▪ Many interventions are simple and of low cost with positive return on investment
▪ What are our roles and responsibilities
Key messages – what needs to be done

- **Workers need to**
  - Be able to speak up, report problems and access timely help
  - Be able to take stretching exercises, physical activity, follow advice given by occupational health and healthcare professionals – they reduce workloss
  - Be able to work together with employers, managers and healthcare professionals to co-design solutions (many simple and low cost) that enable them to stay in work (be in control) and ensure that work tasks match their abilities (risk assessment)
  - Be able to modify their daily routine (flexibility) and self-manage their condition
  - Be supported by peers and managers
Key messages – what needs to be done

- **Workplaces need to**
  - Show commitment and have supportive culture and policies
  - Understand the physical and psychological impact of MSDs – pain, fatigue, impaired function, anxiety and depression
  - Enable, encourage and respond to early reporting of MSDs by having an open culture where workers can talk about challenges and work with managers to co-design solutions
  - Facilitate early intervention - simple adaptations to work or through access to occupational and healthcare services
  - Involvement of the individuals to plan their needs to enable return to work and retention in work
  - Facilitate workers to manage their MSK health and take stretching exercises, physical activity, and self-manage their problem (they usually know how to outside the workplace)
  - Ensure new ways of work consider people with chronic MSDs
  - Design inclusive workplaces for a diverse workforce – ‘Universal Design’
Key messages – what needs to be done

- Healthcare professionals need to
  - Know that good work can benefit people with chronic MSDs and work must be part of treatment discussions and a clinical outcome
  - Ensure individuals know how to manage their MSD and that they get timely advice from someone with the right competencies
Key messages – what needs to be done

- **Policy makers need to**
  - Ensure health system, occupational health and social security processes work together to support people to stay in work despite chronic MSDs (enable phased return to work or flexible working) – policies and practices

![Diagram of Better labour market outcomes]

- 1. Increasing recruitment, employment & career guidance
- 2. Promoting hiring perspectives
- 3. Ensuring reasonable accommodation
- 4. Working with disabilities: prevention
- 5. Returning to work: vocational rehabilitation
- 6. Alternative employment and pathways to open labour market

Union of Equality Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030
Challenges

▪ Making it happen – employers becoming proactive, sharing good practices

▪ Gaining recognition of the importance of MSK health at all ages and investing in promotion, prevention and support

▪ SMEs
And finally

- Thank you to EU-OSHA for such a proactive campaign that has highlighted the challenges of MSK health in the workplace and identifies the needs and opportunities for prevention, health promotion and supporting people with chronic MSDs