Job retention and return-to-work of people with chronic illness:

A woman’s perspective from both sides

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Content

1. Promoting healthy work for employees with chronic illness, an initiative by ENWHP (2011-2013)
2. Models of Good Practice (MOGP)
3. Success factors
4. A guide to good practice, with a six-step-plan for action
5. Two good practices from a woman’s perspective:
   - a woman employer practicing what she preaches
   - a female worker affected by multiple sclerosis

www.enwhp.org
PH Work

- Promoting healthy work for employees with chronic illness - Public Health and Work (PH Work)

  = 9th initiative by the European Network for Workplace Health Promotion (ENWHP)

  - Project details:
    - Slogan Work. Adapted for all. Move Europe
    - Duration 24 months, 2011-2013
    - Closing conference Workplace Health Practices for Employees with Chronic Illness (22-23 October, Brussels)

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Specific objectives

- Identify good practice strategies and interventions with regard to job retention, early intervention and return-to-work (RTW)
- Provide guidance to companies / employers
- Establish cross-border knowledge transfer between experts and stakeholders
- Make recommendations for stakeholders on strategies for workplace health promotion targeted to job retention / RTW
- Raise awareness on the topic

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Process & outputs

- Background paper on working with a chronic condition
- Research report on national return-to-work (RTW) policies
- Selection of 34 Models of Good Practice (MOGP)
- Guide to good practice (guidelines) for employers
- Recommendations for national and European policy
  - for employees
  - for society
  - for employers
34 Models of Good Practice selected under PH Work
16 European countries – wide variety of economic sectors

Gender perspective?
- MOGP targeted to all employees, no discrimination based on age / gender / …
- several good practices belonging to sectors in which jobs are predominantly occupied by women: wellness, education, retail, etc.

Analysis of MOGP led to definition of success factors…

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Success factors

- Integrated approach: close cooperation, coordination and communication with internal and external stakeholders
- Embedding RTW strategies in the overall company strategy
- Keep in contact regularly with employees on sick leave
- Focus on capacities instead of medical diagnoses / limitations
- Start an activity / policy from a “can do” approach
- Create an activating role for the people involved
- Be aware of taboos and prejudices
- Look for a win-win approach
- Combine with general health interventions and campaigns
- Flexibility in working hours (if possible)
Guide to good practice

“Promoting healthy work for workers with chronic illness: A guide to good practice”
Guide to good practice

- **Basic info** on workplace health promotion, chronic illness and return-to-work, why should employers care?

- **Six-step action plan** – crucial steps to be taken when an employee suffers from a chronic illness

- **Checklist on manager support** – tool listing desirable conduct of employers and managers towards employees with a chronic illness

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A six-step action plan

1. Identify who needs help within your organisation
2. Get in touch and maintain regular contact with the person who is off work
3. Set up an initial meeting
4. Case review to capture all relevant data and medical opinions
5. Develop a “get back to work” programme
6. Keep the plan under review

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Case study - 1

A woman employer practicing what she preaches

Carin Wormsbecher

- Director of printing company “Drukkerij Wedding”: ca. 20 employees, located in the Netherlands (Harderwijk)
- Company policy = to create a diverse workforce (including people with disabilities) in which each employee is responsible for the success of the company
- Starting point = Carin’s own “disability”, when taking over the company after the death of her husband

www.enwhp.org
Case study - 1

- **Focus** on skills and abilities, sharing responsibility, working together as a team
- Complemented by the Director with promoting a healthy lifestyle (more physical activity, less alcohol, better food) and setting a good example in this regard
- **Results**
  - more commitment from the employees
  - appreciation from clients and society
  - the inclusive diversity policy brings the company higher profits and a competitive advantage on the market…
Case study - 2

A female worker affected by multiple sclerosis
Isabelle, M.

- Trainer in a training institute, degree of disability: 80%
  - progressive loss of sight
  - difficulty with moving lower limbs
  - back injuries which cause problems when carrying objects
  - tiredness (she works part-time, only mornings)

- Analysis of the working situation and of the tasks Isabelle needs to do in order to work…
Case study - 2

- Short overview of **tasks and solutions provided**:
  - Driving from home to the workplace (25 km)
    - Her husband drives her to work, brings her to entrance, follows up
  - Carry training / business documents
    - Purchase of a special carrier
  - Use of IT tools
    - Purchase of specific equipment: video enlarger, keyboard with large keypad, etc.
  - Working from home (prepare training courses)
    - Financial compensation for hours working from home, purchase of a seat adapted to Isabelle’s morphology, etc.

www.maladie-chronique-travail.eu
Case study - 2

Key factors to success in Isabelle’s case:

- Help from her husband, without it she would not be able to work
- Multidisciplinary approach
- Coordination of actions among all parties and stakeholders (from the professional and the private sphere) involved:
  - occupational physician, family doctor, specialists, functional physiotherapist, occupational therapist, social worker, nurse, employer, HR manager, colleagues and other employees, Health and Safety committee, union, local authorities in charge of health care, patient organisation, ARACT, her husband and relatives, friends, etc.

www.maladie-chronique-travail.eu
Conclusions

- Chronic diseases have a substantial impact on the individual’s working life - which is accompanied by a “rebalancing” of job requirements and private/family requirements and resources.
- A wide variety of existing good practices with regard to job retention and return-to-work support the “can do” approach.
- These good practices provide success factors, guidelines and practical solutions or interventions - which can be copied, adapted and implemented by others.
- The key to success is a good coordination among all parties and stakeholders involved!
More info?

Check out the websites listed below…

www.enwhp.org/enwhp-initiatives/9th-initiative-ph-work.html
www.workadaptedforall.eu
www.maladie-chronique-travail.eu

Don’t hesitate to contact us!