



An Employee has Cancer

The Swiss Cancer League's Guide for Managers
Supporting the Return to the Everyday Work Life



Providing Support for the Return to Everyday Life

Each Type of Cancer is Unique

There isn't just ONE TYPE of Cancer. Each person reacts individually to the disease and deals with the situation in a very personal way.

What Companies Need to Know

Cancer leaves its mark. The physical and psychologically constitutions have changed. Many cancer survivors face fatigue and concentration problems. The affected person is no longer as resilient as before.

Managers/Supervisors Play a Key Role

As a manager or a supervisor, you face a balancing act between responsibility and compassion.

Through careful and conscious accompaniment of your employees, you shall have a decisive influence on the working environment and the reintegration process.

Your human resources department will help you in this challenging time.

Diagnosis and Announcing the Disease to the Employer

« When announcing my illness to the employer, I am afraid that I could lose my job. I feel guilty because this means even a greater workload given to my colleagues. I want security and support, and need someone to listen to me. » Ariane S., Cancer Survivor*

Checklist for Managers and Supervisors (Phase 1)

- I acknowledge and assume my own reactions and uncertainties at the time. If necessary, I consult with the human resources department.
- I assure the affected person that they are still part of the company and that their health is the priority.
- I maintain an empathetic attitude. I offer my support and am willing to listen.
- I clarify the affected person's personal needs: Who should be informed; when and how? What does the affected person want to be informed about?
- In order to accompany the affected person in an optimal manner, I follow a common strategy with the human resources department.
- I respect the communication needs of the affected person and respect their privacy.
- I pay special attention to the team's mood. I offer individual meetings and team meetings. I reiterate in these conversations that emotional concerns and uncertainties in dealing with cancer are normal and legitimate. Together, we can clarify any apprehensions concerning additional workloads.

Treatment of the Disease

« During my absence I would like that I shall maintain my confidence. I really appreciate it when you ask about my health and that I am still considered as an employee. The possibility to continue working helps me to maintain my professional identity and my social contacts. »

Claude M., Cancer Survivor*

Checklist for Managers and Supervisors (Phase 2)

- If the affected person wishes, I ask about their health. I pay attention to what the person says and keep in contact in a low-keyed manner, depending on the relationship with the person and my own discretion. I talk to the team colleagues myself in order to prevent that they feel pressured in anyway.
- I let the affected person know that they are recognized as a member of the team. For example, I invite the person to take part in events or send them – according to their wishes – activity reports or meeting minutes.
- I assure the affected person that they can keep their workplace in the company (workplace security). At the same time, I let the person know that their health has priority. I can support the person by explaining to them that their work is well distributed to their work colleagues and/or their replacement and is being properly undertaken. This is to ensure that it is properly understood by the affected person.
- If the affected person continues to work, I pay special attention to maintaining a good balance between empathetic and everyday work attitude. I offer the person my support and listen to them. However, they are also treated like everyone else. I remain flexible to unforeseen situations associated with the disease. From time to time, I arrange a site meeting with the human resources department.

Reintegration into Employment

« When I return, I must be able to see that the company is prepared for my return and that I can go back to my work again; one step at a time. I am looking forward to a welcome conversation on the first day. Colleagues should understand that certain symptoms such as fatigue or anxiety can persist long after treatment. » Beat W., Cancer Survivor*

Checklist for Supervisors/Managers (Phase 3)

- I organize the gradual resumption of the affected person's professional activities. In doing so, I pay attention to a reasonable workload that corresponds to the person's degree of recovery. I do not put any blame on the affected person due to a lowered and/or reduced workload.
- When an employee returns, I offer flexibility concerning working hours, work content and responsibilities.
- I organize a welcome conversation, together with the human resources department.
- I pay attention to the correct balance between being particularly empathetic and everyday social interaction. The affected person requires my presence and support. At the same time, the person would like to be treated just like all other work team members are treated.
- I make myself aware that the affected person's return to work does not mean that it is the end of the disease or the person's treatment.
- I observe whether the affected person is particularly tired or if she is afraid of losing her job or seems particularly stigmatized. If this is the case, I try to have a conversation with the person.
- I organize regular feedback meetings over the long term, together with the human resources department.



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