

**Physiotherapy works ✓**

# Occupational Health

**Physiotherapy is clinically effective and cost effective in the provision of occupational health services - getting people back to work**

## Physiotherapy

Physiotherapists can stop people going off work in the first place, get people back to work on full normal duties and if alternative or modified duties are required, facilitate a managed return to work.

The Work Foundation reports that for every £1 invested in wellbeing initiatives, businesses get a return of £3.<sup>(1)</sup>

Research by Price Waterhouse Cooper for the Department of Work and Pensions found consistent evidence that health and well being initiatives by 55 UK employers ranging in size from 70 to 100,000+ employees had reduced absence rates and improved productivity. In one case, a Call Centre reaped £34 of return for every £1 they invested in terms of reduced absence rates and improved staff retention through providing in house and discounted physiotherapy for their staff. In another instance, a manufacturing company reduced the number of working days lost to MSDs by 80 per cent with a return on investment of £12 for every £1.<sup>(4)</sup>

## Size of the problem

- Illness and injury accounted for an estimated 29.3 million days off work in 2008/09, with each person affected taking an average 20.8 days off work.<sup>(2)</sup>
- Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are consistently the most commonly reported type of work related illness. Each person with a MSD took an estimated 17.2 days off sick and an estimated 9.3 million working days were lost in 2008/09 through MSDs caused or made worse by work.<sup>(2)</sup>
- On average, NHS staff take 10.7 days sick leave a year, the public sector as a whole take 9.7 days and the private sector 6.4 days.<sup>(3)</sup>

The Royal Mail's occupational support and therapy programme, including physiotherapy, has had substantial financial benefits, with the programme providing a return of approximately £5 for every £1 invested. Absence was cut by 25 per cent between 2004 and 2007 and 3,600 employees absent through illness or injury were brought back into work. Before the programme, the estimated cost to the Royal Mail of the absence and restricted duties of clients in the study group was £1,384,501. Since the programme, this has fallen to £127,738. On the premise that absence and restricted duties would have continued at similar rates without the rehabilitation programme, the saving is in excess of £1m a year.<sup>(5)</sup>

**Absence was cut by 25% between 2004 and 2007**



AstraZeneca started its "Well-being in AstraZeneca" programme for its 10,000 staff in the UK in 2000. Through the provision of rehabilitation and treatment services such as physiotherapy, and health promotion such as sports facilities and health screening, the company has saved £200,000 a year in health insurance spend and absence levels are 31 per cent lower than average levels.<sup>(6)</sup>

York Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust cut its long term sickness rates by more than 40 per cent through early intervention with physiotherapy and

psychotherapy. The number of staff off work for more than four weeks dropped from 99 to 57 and the number of staff off sick for more than three months dropped from 52 to 28. The project cost £100,000 but has saved the trust around £200,000.<sup>(7)</sup>

## Legal position

Employers have a legal duty to prevent the occurrence of risks of injury or illness, which are reasonably foreseeable in relation to their employees but there is no legal obligation to implement clinical governance in occupational health.<sup>(8)</sup> Only 12.5 per cent of UK employers provide rehabilitation services<sup>(9)</sup> and as few as 6.5 per cent of small businesses provide any access to occupational health services.<sup>(10)</sup>

## Conclusion

Physiotherapists and other allied health professionals are in a prime position to help keep employees healthy by enabling the individual to understand prevention of disease chronicity, re-occurrence, and strategies to self-manage effectively. The expansion and introduction of occupational health schemes is not only in the interests of the individual affected, but also saves employers, the health services and society money and improves productivity.

## Cost of ill health



- 22 per cent of people on Incapacity Benefit (Employment Support Allowance) have a MSD<sup>(11)</sup>
- MSDs account for up to one third of all GP consultations and cost society approximately £7.4 billion a year.<sup>(12)</sup>
- A survey of 76 NHS organisations found that the average estimated cost of sickness absence was almost £5 million a year.<sup>(13)</sup>
- The Boorman Report states that by reducing the current rates of sickness absence in the NHS by a third, there would be 33.4 million 'additional' available working days a year within the NHS, equivalent to an extra 14,900 whole-time equivalent staff with an estimated annual direct cost saving of £555 million.<sup>(3)</sup>

## Further information

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