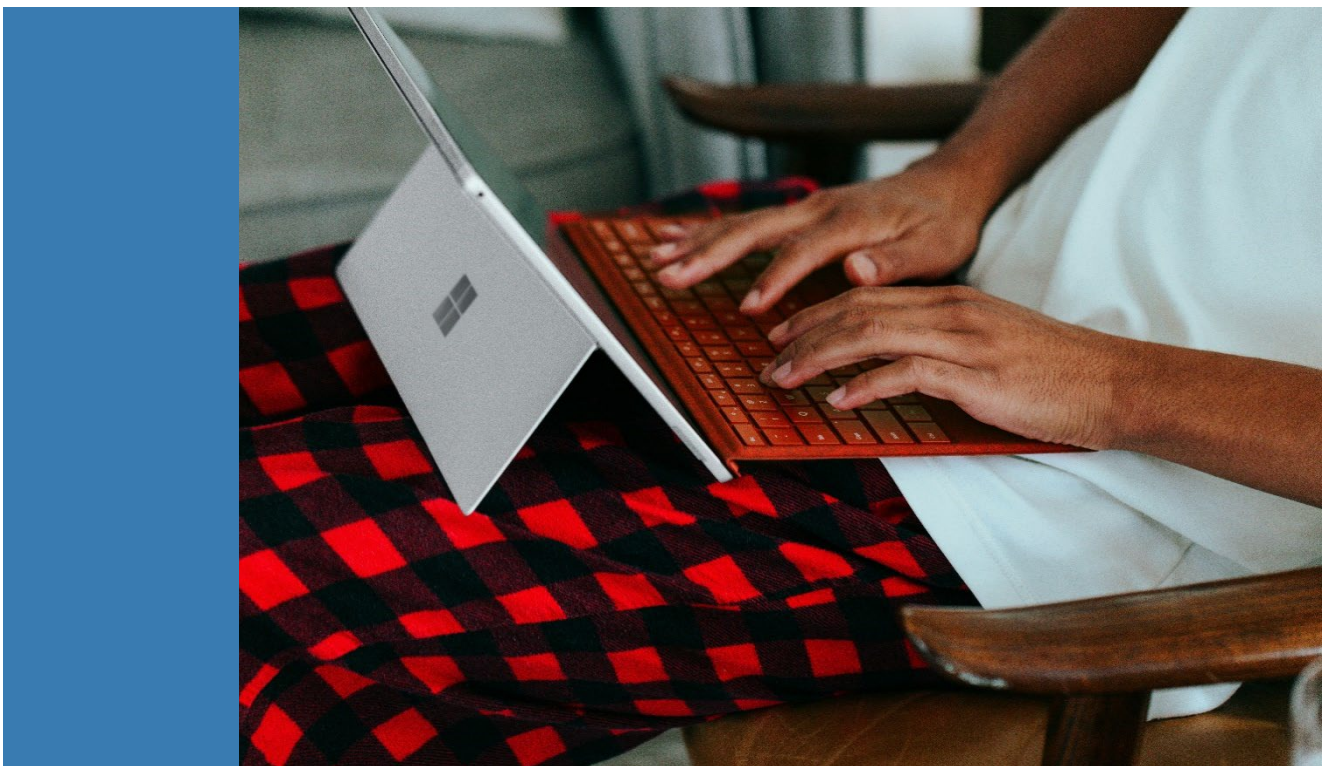


How organisations can best support employees returning to work and thriving in work following cancer

Case studies

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NHS Integrated Care Board

Participant background and context

This case study is based on interviews with two members of staff working in an NHS Integrated Care Board; a line manager, and the employee they manage who has recently had a lived experience of a cancer diagnosis and treatment, which necessitated some time away from work.

The employee with lived experience of cancer has worked in their current position for six years, full-time. They described their work as demanding, working in a *'busy role with a heavy workload'*, as they commission support services for patients with both physical and emotional needs. They received their diagnosis almost 20 months ago, and they are currently 'cancer free', but explained they were still on surveillance, to ensure there isn't a recurrence, and will continue to have check-ups at regular intervals.

My cancer diagnosis came as a bit of a shock because there were no symptoms. I went for a routine check, and they saw an abnormal mass in a scan...I am now signed off as cancer free, and have been given a clean bill of health, but I am under surveillance, so it doesn't mean I will never get the cancer again. But I am hoping that that is it, and it stays like that.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

They provided an overview of the treatment they received, which included chemo-radiotherapy, and following a complication a further round of chemotherapy, which they described as *'vigorous and aggressive'*. Following this, and discovering that the tumour had shrunk, they had *'major invasive surgery'* to remove the tumour, after which it was recommended they have about 6 months for respite and recovery. They are also experiencing a number of side-effects as a result of their treatment and are consequently working from home.

I do feel tired on and off, there is no specific time or day when I do, but I do feel that. I have also been getting pins and needles on my fingertips and in my feet. And on my feet, I also have numbness. I also now have a stoma, and a stoma nurse who comes to see me every few months.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

The employee's line manager has worked in their current role for 3 years, although has been line managing staff for over twenty years across their career. The individual currently line manages three other members of staff, but also oversees the team in which they work. They believed that one of the important aspects of line management was to *'provide space to actively listen, and to have empathy so that you can know and understand the position that the person you are working with is in'*. Line management was not always easy though, and they discussed how even if disagreements occur, it is important to recognise these and come to a joint understanding with regards to how to proceed.

I wouldn't want to manage any more people, as you need to give them the time they need for development and to recognise and listen to any issues...but when managing people, you do have to be clear about boundaries and expectations and be clear along the whole line management journey.

Line Manager

Both participants recognised that there is an important link between work and health, and there is a responsibility on all organisational staff to create a culture where health and wellbeing is respected, and where staff can openly discuss any concerns that they may be experiencing within the workplace. The employee with lived experience of cancer discussed that:

To me work is very important. I am very serious about work, and work was going to play a therapeutic part in my recovery. But I do realise that there is a pull and push tension about going to work and not ruining yourself, and so at the same time I didn't want work to become detrimental to my health.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

As a result, they also believed that it was important to be transparent about their health, and from the outset were open and honest about their cancer diagnosis and the impact that their treatment was having on their ability to work. They explained that throughout this time they had a mantra that, *'I was to be guided by what my body tells me...and if work was having an adverse effect on me, I reviewed my work pattern'*. Through discussions with their medical and surgical teams, and with additional family guidance they did decide to take an extended period of sickness absence that was agreed with HR and their manager.

The line manager emphasised that health and wellbeing is something discussed as part of their management supervisions and was keen to ensure that those they manage have a positive work-life balance and if a health issue did occur that they had *'an understanding of the expectation of support that can be given'*. They also noted that HR were available to provide advice if there were questions or concerns about health and wellbeing issues.

Organisation policies and practices

Currently the organisation does not have a cancer specific policy, and there were questions over whether a specific policy would be beneficial. The employee with lived experience of cancer believed that having a cancer policy was necessary, as a result of the increase in cancer rates and the likelihood that workplaces would be having to face similar situations in the future.

Every organisation should have its own cancer policy because of the number of people who get cancer and people having higher cancer rates...I think it needs to include a training and awareness programme for staff, exclusive cancer training sessions for managers. This should be mandatory as it is about people's health.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

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The line manager recognised that although cancer is a challenging situation that organisations, employers and employees have to face, they were not certain whether a specific cancer policy would be fully beneficial. They argued that there are many long-term health conditions that staff could experience that may each have their individual nuances that would need to be managed, and it may be that going forward a greater clarity in processes and procedures that need to be undertaken and completed would be of more help.

I'm not sure how helpful a specific cancer policy would be. What I would prefer is there to be better processes for covering staff sickness, which will cover a range of illnesses, and then people could follow the process. And when you go through that process, there could be meeting templates and letter templates that can then be adapted to the situation that you find yourself in.

Line Manager

In this case, a number of policies and practices were implemented to help support the employee through their diagnosis, treatment and return to work. The employee mentioned that they were referred to Occupational Health (which was provided by a third-party organisation). Although they were pleased that this was provided to them, they did feel that they had to push to speak to '*someone who was competent and knew what they were doing.*' Once they had been referred to the correct person, they commented that:

I spoke to the OH provider about whatever I wanted to speak about, and they were great as they understood what I was saying, my condition and I felt like I could have a good discussion. They also did provide some reasonable adjustments that they thought would help that the organisation followed up with.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

The employee's diagnosis and treatment meant that they did have to have an extended period of sickness absence to recuperate following surgery. The employee mentioned that they had just under a year out of work. Both the employee and the line manager noted that there were some keep-in-touch points throughout this time, to understand how the employee was feeling throughout their treatment, and what would aid them in their return to work.

I did get support. People kept in touch to ask how I was feeling? What's going on? Colleagues were keeping in touch and messaging me, and my manager did come to see me. I never stopped people from keeping in touch with me...but at the same time, I do feel that some were a bit scared to get in touch because of how the cancer was affecting me.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

However, when the participant felt ready to return to work, there was a phased-return to work that was very much employee-led, as well as a discussion about their job design as it was recognised that the employee did work in a cognitively demanding role.

We did provide an extended return to work period, and we looked at the job role as they do work in an extremely pressurised role which is difficult when they are trying to manage their own issues as well. I still keep my eye on the capacity of work, because they are still on that recovery journey.

Line Manager

The employee was keen to get back into a rhythm of employment because, ‘to me it was a little bit therapeutic’, but started the phased return to work process slowly, and felt very supported doing it this way, aided by the knowledge that, ‘they know that I am not the type of person who would play hooky’. The flexibility in the phased return was important for the employee as it meant that:

I would work different hours of the day, different times of the day to identify the different pinch points, and see what times made me tired. And slowly I increased the number of hours I worked and the number of days I was working gradually. But the medical team were keen for it to be slow, so it wasn't one step forward and three back.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

Opportunities, challenges and future changes

Throughout this experience, both the line manager and the employee with lived experience of cancer were able to recognise areas of organisational practice that worked well. It is well recognised that line management can be a difficult role, and the line manager spoke about the guidance and support they had access to, from both their peers and their supervisors. This provided assistance in areas such as workforce rights and actions that needed to be implemented in this case, but also helped them to gain access to further information of where to signpost the employee to for further help and information.

I have a brilliant manager and senior leadership team, with a regular round of supervision, and had a dialogue with my manager when I needed it...there are a number of my peers in the leadership team who also have a really good understanding of workforce rights and opportunities that are available.

Line Manager

Both participants also reported that receiving coaching was beneficial for the employee living with cancer to navigate the experience of having treatment and its side effects, as well as adjusting to life ‘post-cancer’ and returning to work. The coaching was described as pivotal in aiding the employee to understand what their needs in the workplace were, how to articulate how they were feeling, but also to make them aware of what any further recovery progression may look like.

The coaching was great and provided me with so much support. They were able to help me see that cancer is not a linear progression to recovery...I was able to have a good chat with them, and they helped me to understand that just because I felt good one day that would not always mean I would feel the same the next.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

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However, challenges when managing staff working with and recovering from cancer were also acknowledged by both participants. The employee with lived experience of cancer discussed that although knowledge of cancer is improving through general awareness days, they believed that organisations can still be inadequately informed about what a person living with cancer experiences, and how to broach conversations about the illness and treatment. The line manager also discussed how employers can still struggle with knowing what to say when a cancer diagnosis is disclosed, as well as manage any emotions they may have, especially if they have had a personal experience of cancer.

You can still have a reaction when people tell you that you have cancer. When you hear that word, you still think that it is a route to dying. And you hope not to show that on your face. You have to cover your own emotional reactions to things, and then deal with the emotional responses.

Line Manager

The line manager also noted difficulties when organisational policies are not as flexible as they could be, which can create tensions when trying to practically implement them. Both the line manager and the employee discussed the rigidity in the policy regarding carrying over unused annual leave when someone has been on long-term sickness absence. Through discussions the issue was resolved, and the employee did not lose any of their accumulated leave. However, if there had been greater flexibility in the policy then this would have been easier for both the individual and employer.

There does need to be some flex in organisational policy for someone with cancer, because there was a tension when I was trying to encourage the use of annual leave as quickly as possible, but they were not in a position to take it...the cancer journey can be longer than 'typical' illness and that needs to be factored in.

Line Manager

This is also related to a common line management challenge, of having to navigate employee health with organisational outcomes and work targets that still need to be achieved. The line manager highlighted that this occurs with any long-term illness and is not restricted to someone with a cancer diagnosis, however it is a management demand that can be tricky to navigate in an already emotionally heightened situation.

As a manager, supporting a member of staff is 100% your priority from the perspective of their rights as a human being, but it is also really important as a manager to be able to deliver a service.

Line Manager

As a result of these challenges, both participants had recommendations for what organisations could benefit from in the future when supporting employees living and working with cancer. They both discussed the potential for coaching or mentoring and the provision of resources to help the line manager to navigate common managerial tensions when an employee has a long-term sickness absence, but with cancer specifically, the need to recognise that there are various stages of cancer, and the 'journey' of a patient continues even when they have returned to work.

There needs to be mandatory training sessions for managers in every department...someone needs to speak to them about cancer and how things work with cancer. It's not just a physical illness, but it has the potential to really ruin your emotional and mental health...rates are predicted to go higher and survival rates are increasing, and people will need to carry on working. So, they do need to have training.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

As alluded to above, there was also discussion about the need for policies to be more attuned to the needs of the individual, with the understanding that returning 'to health' after a cancer diagnosis is a process, and current policies may not recognise this.

I think some policies do have to be slightly tweaked to be more responsive to the understanding of their position, their recovery and their return to work. The current language doesn't recognise that there are nuances here. There needs to be an understanding, in returning to work for example, that when someone comes back after cancer it's not 12 weeks and its back to normal, it could be over a year until someone is back to where they think they should be.

Line Manager

The employee with lived experience of cancer also agreed that support could be more individualised and employee-led, with greater consultation with employees about what would be most beneficial for them when considering work, the workplace and any adjustments to both their job design and physical workplace set-up.

There needs to be no if's or but's. You need to get that support, and most times the patient knows best. No decisions about me, without me is something that should be remembered. You need to listen to the employee, you need to listen to the person who has had the cancer.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

Finally, both participants recognised that cancer is going to be a long-term health condition that will become more common, and so having 'good practices' in place is important, so that organisations can be more proactive in providing a safe environment for disclosure and have resources ring-fenced for adjustments, including coaching or additional support (for both the manager and the employee) that may be required.

Organisations do need to be more proactive, they need to remember it's people that run the organisation and not neglect that human dimension. Cancer can strike anyone, a manager, or a direct report and staff do not need to be more stressed at these times. It's stressful enough and you don't need any additional stress dealing with organisational issues.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

Charity with a remit for supporting the older population

Participant background and context

This case study is based on interviews with three members of a charity that aims to reduce inequalities faced by the ageing population. Those involved in the case study included a member of the HR team, an employee with lived experience of cancer who was diagnosed when at the organisation and who has recently undergone cancer treatment and completed a phased return to work, and their line manager.

The HR representative has been at the organisation for 2 years but was keen to build the HR function to make it *'more efficient, and to give it more direction and focus'*. The organisation has grown in size, and the HR function hadn't grown with the organisation until the last couple of years, so they were in the process of embedding HR more centrally within the organisation. They discussed how HR was there to help lead, guide and support the managers and all the staff when organisational and work concerns arose, and was in the process of developing organisational policies and practices to make them more accessible and user friendly. All policies are now stored in the Employee Information area on SharePoint. They commented that HR had responsibility for ensuring there was a 'safe' culture, so that employees felt supported at work and were able to approach them for help when required.

I would like to think that we are a very supportive organisation, and that we can support staff and help them when they need it...we know that how people can feel can have an impact on their work and we want to do what we can to support them. We try and promote that we as HR are here...it is about promoting a culture where people can talk in confidence.

HR Representative

The line manager agreed that the organisation was keen to make sure that *'work was not stressful'* for employees, and so that was integral to their management style. They also discussed how health and wellbeing was a priority throughout the organisation, that it was important that all employees got support, and that good practice was promoted across all levels of staff. They currently lead a team of ten employees, but personally line manages three of them. There was recognition that being a line manager can be challenging as each direct report can have different needs, and their own preferences about what they want from the line managerial relationship. However, there were fundamental characteristics they believed that line managers should display:

What we do as line managers is terribly important, right? We have to make sure that a job isn't damaging someone, that they don't have unrealistic expectations, they have the right level of autonomy and that they have clear goals...it's getting the balance between giving someone professional development and giving someone a professional identity...I like just to be human, and you need someone who is human.

Line Manager

The line manager expressed they felt conscious that people in their team had challenges that needed to be addressed, but to do this effectively there needed to be 'a *prioritisation of trust and transparency*', and that fair practices had to be implemented to satisfy HR, the manager and individual employees.

This belief that organisations need to create the right conditions to support employee health and wellbeing was echoed by the employee with lived experience of cancer. They discussed how an organisational culture should help staff be open and honest, and said that they '*can't imagine going through things without being able to share it with your manager*'.

The employee has been at the organisation for nearing two years but was diagnosed with cancer within their first few months of employment. Even though they had only been working at the organisation for a short period of time, they described their overall experience of support as '*a very positive one*', especially as on hearing they had cancer and all the associated treatment had a '*huge, huge impact on my life*'. At the time of interview, they described themselves as '*cancer free*', having gone through chemotherapy, surgery and a course of radiotherapy. However, they explained the toll this had taken on their health and wellbeing:

I had been feeling quite low, but this is part of the course once you have gone through all the medical treatment. All the psychological implications start to show, and there is the realisation of everything that you have just been through. I have been able to share this with my line manager and with the support of my work (and my GP) I took some time off, agreed a phased return back to work and have discussed the things that work for me to support my mental health.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

Work was seen as very important to the employee, not only for financial reasons (although this was a concern for the individual as they were very new to the role), but because it provided them with a sense of normality when everything else was in a state of flux, and having a project to focus on was positive for their mental health. It was for this reason, and because they felt that they had a positive line managerial relationship that they disclosed as soon as they had their diagnosis.

I disclosed immediately. My line manager knew I was going for a scan...it was surprisingly easy to do so considering I had not been there for very long. Straight away (the line manager) was very supportive, very empathetic...I tried to work throughout the time, work is important to me.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

The employee also felt it was important to let their peers know about their diagnosis, as they were aware that others could have been affected by the news (both personally and professionally) and wanted others to receive support if they also required it.

Organisation policies and practices

The recent change in the HR management at the organisation has meant that many policies were currently under review. However, this was also occurring due to recent changes in legislation to flexible work and carer leave. Working alongside the senior management team and the staff forum, HR were hoping that developing and updating organisational policies would make them more accessible to staff.

All the policies we have at the moment are quite standard, but we are developing them at the moment in content and the language that is being used...we are trying to make them so that when someone does open the policy then will not close it straight away.

HR Representative

The line manager was aware of a 'directory of policies' that the organisation has but was honest enough to admit that 'I am not sure whether all line managers in the organisation know where to find them – I do'. However, they were keen to emphasise that there are good communication lines between HR and other line managers when urgent matters need to be addressed, and managers were unaware of the action that should be taken. The employee living with cancer mentioned they were unsure where to access organisational policies but had confidence in their line manager that good practice was being implemented.

I am not aware of the policies and practices that organisations have, but all I got was positive messaging from my line manager about what could be done for me and the support that I would be getting, which is all that I really asked for.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

In terms of what policies and practices were used in this case to help the employee living with cancer, both the HR and line manager mentioned the use of the sickness absence policy (which included keep in touch meetings and arranging and implementing a phased return to work), the flexible and hybrid work policy, carers leave and issues arising around statutory sick pay.

The line manager discussed that some policies were especially helpful when working to support the employee living with cancer. For example, the sickness absence policy was especially relevant when the employee had to take time off for their surgery, the resulting recovery period and when they wanted to return to work.

We do have a process in place for discussing return to work, but the trigger comes from what adjustments may be needed to both the workplace if necessary and to job design.

Line Manager

Both the line manager and the employee mentioned that being in open communication with each other, and understanding the capability of the individual following their treatment

is what is most important in such situations. Any discussions by the line manager were more *'informal but very trust based'*, with the aim to make the situation most beneficial for the individual and the employer. The employee and HR also discussed the role of Occupational Health at this time, providing an assessment including informed guidance with regards to any adaptations to be made.

We don't have an in-house Occupational Health, but we used an external one here. They can be helpful. They do provide some generic advice, but they can also provide some really good professional ergonomic advice, so we know that we can implement that in conjunction with the knowledge that the line manager has. They can be there and provide an excellent second opinion.

HR Representative

The employee living with cancer appreciated the referral to Occupational Health, both in terms of the provision of workplace recommendations and reasonable adjustments, but also making them aware of their rights under the Equality Act, and what they should be entitled to receiving. They were very happy with how the organisation implemented the phased return to work, the consultation from all involved, and the flexibility offered whilst they re-adjusted to work post-surgery.

I did do a phased return to work. We started off slowly to see what I was able to cope with. We had meetings about how this would work, but it was very much about giving me autonomy and flexibility. Things are still a bit flexible now, as the ability to work can very much depend on whether I have slept or if I have a lot of appointments going on.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

The need for flexibility in both work time, workplace and job design was something mentioned by all participants. This was especially important when treatment started, as hospital appointments, and the side effects of treatment needed to be factored in. Looking at job role was also seen as important:

We did look at job role and the work they were doing and tried to focus their time on pockets of the role that would be less stressful, but still enjoyable for them to be working on, instead of having to juggle the many elements of their role.

HR Representative

The ability to undertake hybrid work was also important, especially with concerns about reduced immunity throughout chemotherapy, but also meant that the employee could work in an environment that was comfortable for them and allowed for greater flexibility for rest if required. The line manager did recognise that they had to be *'more mindful of this sometimes'* to ensure that the employee was not working when they felt unwell or masking treatment effects. However, once again, this came back to having an open and trusting relationship, where people felt comfortable in being able to disclose what was occurring, and what additional support was necessary.

One policy where flexibility was shown related to sickness absence and occupational sick pay. The employee living with cancer had only been working for a few months in the organisation when they received their diagnosis, so they were technically still in their

probationary period. This did lead to some concern about the amount of occupational sick pay they would be entitled to. However, the line manager knew that this would be an added concern to the employee at a time when extra stressors needed to be reduced, and so approached HR to understand what adjustments could be made in this case, so the employee did not have to worry about their financial wellbeing as well as their cancer diagnosis and treatment.

So, the biggest things are the sick leave policy, and basically we have a policy that how much sick leave people are entitled to is dependent on their longevity at the organisation. And this is also related to enhanced occupational sick pay. So, I knew that I needed to do something and request an adjustment here.

Line Manager

I was still on my probation, and so there were questions about sick pay and things like that. But they just made it that I had passed my probation, and so I was moved onto the next pay level. I was very grateful for that.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

All three participants discussed whether a specific cancer policy would be beneficial for the employees and the organisation with regards to how working with cancer is managed in the future. The over-riding consensus was that a specific policy may be difficult to implement because cancer is not a homogenous illness, and each person will have their own treatment plans and individual reactions (both physical and mental) to their diagnosis and treatment.

Every cancer is different, so by the time you develop a policy, you will have to make many iterations of the same policy...it is not just one illness, people's experience of cancer is different, so it might not help what you are asking it to do.

Line Manager

The HR representative added that having a policy for one specific condition could lead to 'a minefield' for all the other conditions that people experience at work. They believed that:

What we could develop is a generic health policy to help all people in the organisation who have a long-term health condition, and we can firm up what we have in place and what we can do to help staff.

HR Representative

Similarly, the employee with lived experience of cancer commented on how many considerations when supporting an employee with cancer (including reasonable adjustments, flexible work, keep in touch meetings, job design and potential careers counselling) are relevant to employees with other long-term health conditions. They highlighted that how a condition is managed at work is not solely down to a policy per se, but how HR and line managers implement good practices that an organisation may already have.

Really, these things are about the ability of the line manager and the organisation to support the person and specifics around a condition and making sure that people feel supported. It is not around a specific policy, but just making sure that you have good policies and practices in place and that they are well understood and well implemented.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

Opportunities, challenges and future changes

All three participants recognised challenges that organisations, managers and employees can face when managing someone at work with cancer. The first common challenge is the uncertainty of cancer, not only in terms of its prognosis, but also in terms of treatment plans (and an individual's responsiveness to treatment), but also how people will react emotionally to their diagnosis and what may follow.

One of the biggest challenges is, you just don't know how someone is going to be from week to week. You don't know what adjustments may have to be revisited, how someone is going to feel, and how long the situation is going to last...cancer is a fluctuating condition, and treatment can go in phases, and you don't know how that will affect someone physically or psychologically...

Line Manager

The employee living with cancer agreed, but also took this challenge a step further, when they explained:

Cancer doesn't just stop. People need to be aware that these feelings carry on, and you can be ok one minute and then something will just come back, and that something will begin to impact you in a different way. So, there is a long-term awareness that people need to have about it.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

The HR representative discussed how this could lead to two organisational challenges: developing a culture of support where people feel able to disclose their condition and continuous treatment, and how this is then managed effectively in the workplace. Although they recognised that *'it is very difficult for anyone to say that they have not come into contact with, or know someone who has had cancer'*, they were still aware that there may be a taboo around the issue and that some may have difficulty with what the appropriate things to say are.

Some people still do not quite know what to do or say, and so that is a challenge about how to help and support people still. This can make a barrier with disclosure, and then how individuals could deal with it, and how they go through diagnosis and treatment.

HR representative

The line manager recognised that in organisations a lot of responsibility for how the situation is managed, does fall on them, which leads to a range of management challenges, including being able to control emotions when a disclosure happens, how to balance employee wellbeing versus project outputs and productivity, and how to *'step in'* when an employee with a health condition may be doing too much.

There is a huge element of decision making. Making decisions about whether someone can do the work whilst not disempowering them is difficult, especially with the challenge of maintaining delivery. So, for a manager there really is that tough balance between how do I help this human in front of me and how do I achieve my work objectives? You don't want to patronise the person, or treat them as a patient, but it is also hard to know when they should stop, and when they can go. How do you go about making an assessment about what they can do versus letting them tell you what they want to do? What is the best way to stand in when someone is not coping, when you know that work is part of their identity and doesn't endanger what work is giving them?

Line Manager

The employee living with cancer recognised this tension that line managers can have, as well as acknowledging the challenge that each individual may also have their own personal experience of cancer, and so it may be difficult for managers *'to struggle with their own emotions'*, especially as managing someone with cancer can be a long-term responsibility.

There is also something about the commitment and understanding of managers for the long-term support they have to put in...it's not just in the initial stages or once the treatment is done...you will need support for however long you need it for afterwards, even when things are not visible. It's not about making assumptions that everything is alright now.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

However, all participants agreed that it was the support that the organisation provided line managers that worked well in this case. The HR representative was very aware of the pressures that line managers face in their roles, even without managing an employee with a long-term health condition, and so were keen to emphasise the support and outreach that HR can provide managers.

Line managers need to have support from HR, and know that we are here to guide and support, to have that conversation with, and where they can get further resources to help... I was there to make sure that the line manager was managing themselves too. Managing their emotions is just as important.

HR Representative

Part of the support provided for the line manager was a course of coaching that they were allowed to use their training and development budget to access. They discussed how the coaching was *'so beneficial and so helpful'* as it provided professional advice which meant that the manager could have more confidence when supporting their employee living with cancer.

The coaching was really helpful as you had someone with experience of the situation, and it was good to talk to someone about how stressful the situation can be, how to protect the individual and the organisation and how to balance everything.

Line Manager

The employee living with cancer felt reassured that both they and their line manager has access to coaching, as it made them feel that the organisation was serious about

supporting employees living with cancer in the workplace, but also meant that all the relevant information about employee and employer rights were being shared, and that the *'right conditions for allowing for information sharing'* were created. They also added that the organisation was also proactive in being 'employee led', and the positive relationship with both the line manager and HR meant they felt they were able to be open and transparent about their needs, requirements and work wishes.

I was one of those people who wanted to get the right support, so there was something about I knew what I wanted and when I wanted control, but it was important for me to be transparent and feel comfortable enough for me to be...they took a very practical approach.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

When thinking about what else could be done in the future to better support employees living with cancer, the unanimous response was to continue the training and coaching for all managers so that they can be armed with appropriate support tools and resources. This training would include both understanding about organisational policies and practices, as well as the nature of cancer, potential treatment side effects and a greater understanding of what working with cancer could be like. Although the line manager in this case was applauded for their support, there was acknowledgement from HR that there could be better consistency across managerial levels.

There is always more work to do in management training, what we have at the moment is very much provided on an individual basis, rather than having something more structured in place, and this can be improved especially if we promote new managers or have new staff joining...there needs to be support for managers in how to have these conversations and feeling more confident about having them. It's not just about supporting the employee but supporting the manager too.

HR Representative

The employee living with cancer believed that although 'awareness days' in organisations can be helpful, going forward it would be beneficial for organisations to demonstrate that commitment for supporting staff with long-term health conditions every day, so it's not just a 'soft-touch' approach but wellbeing, job design, workload and support are embedded in every day discussions.

It is about the authenticity of support, and having a real commitment from employers to continuously put employees first.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

The line manager agreed that creating a network of staff to discuss the issue within the organisation to create a platform for change and some internal accountability could also be beneficial, and this could show that the organisation is a 'good employer' to help employees, not just with cancer but with other long-term conditions, to return to work successfully and thrive in the workplace.

NHS Foundation Trust

Participant background and context

This case study is based on interviews with two members of an NHS Foundation Trust; an employee who has recently experienced a cancer diagnosis and treatment, and their line manager. Both staff members have been employed at the Trust for approximately two decades and have developed a positive employer-employee relationship, as they have either worked in the same team, or have been in a line management relationship over that time.

The line manager currently manages five members of staff directly, and believes that *'listening skills are one of the most important skills that you can have as a manager... you need to give people time for reflection if someone is talking to you about a situation they need support with'*. They recognised that a line manager has responsibility to help employees excel at work, but for this to occur, openness and transparency is important as well as not stretching yourself too thin, so that attention can be provided to staff when required.

It is quite an honour to be a line manager of anybody because they put their trust in you. I am driven by people...As long as you can influence positively and influence the rest of the team then (being a line manager) is ok. When it gets diluted and your agenda or portfolio becomes too big and you are thinly spread, that is when attention can lapse from important things.

Line Manager

The employee living with cancer has undergone 15 months of cancer treatment, including chemotherapy, two surgeries, radiotherapy and a further course of chemotherapy. On receiving their diagnosis, they explained that *'it feels like one day you are fine, and the next day you are diagnosed and that's it, your life as you know it just drops.'* Throughout this time, they reported not being able to fault the care and support of both the hospital clinical staff and their work and team colleagues. Although, on their own admission, they noted *'I tend to be a positive person'*, the tiredness and fatigue as a side-effect of their treatment was something they found difficult. Even though they have recently had a clear scan, they are still experiencing some pain around the surgery area, and so is keen to get this examined.

I want to get it checked out, as you always have it in the back of your mind that this can come back, so you think 'what is going on?'. I try not to let it worry me, but it does. It does go through your mind every day.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

Both participants discussed the importance of work for health. The line manager mentioned that it was *'truly important'* that work was supportive of health, and that

employees will work better when they are supported by managers and senior managers in the Trust, and as such wellbeing is seen as an important consideration in the organisation.

As an organisation we are asking questions about what's good, and what can we do better and what is important (to staff). It is an important agenda item, and I would say it rarely drops from the pecking order.

Line Manager

The employee living with cancer discussed how when they were first diagnosed, they *'didn't think about work, I just knew I had to battle this horrible demon'*. However, they also mentioned that work was important, not just financially, but through the support they received from their peers. It was for this reason, they were able to disclose their diagnosis to their manager, and their peers, as they knew they would have the help and care from those they worked with.

Work gives a reality check with what is happening. You have that contentment at work, your work family is really important – more often than not you spend more time with them than your own family.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

Organisation policies and practices

The line manager mentioned that when helping their employee throughout the cancer diagnosis, treatment and return to work, they had a *'strong line of communication'* with HR to ensure that the *'chain of support'* for both themselves, and the employee was in place. They mentioned that the organisation has a number of wellbeing interventions such as an employee assistance programme, occupational health support, and a wellbeing platform where staff can access a range of information, such as line manager support and financial wellbeing. They also added that:

The organisation is looking at doing some work so staff can connect, and they know who to connect with. We are looking to see what we can do better, so that if a member of staff comes forward to say they have cancer, they know they can seek advice and seek support from one another.

Line Manager

However, there were also generic policies that were used in this case to help the employee throughout their cancer journey. Both participants mentioned how issues such as 'keep in touch' meetings were undertaken, discussions about a phased return to work (if and when the employee was ready) were had, and statutory sick pay, flexible working arrangements and reasonable adjustment policies and practices were put into action.

The employee noted how the keep in touch meetings were held *'very much on my own terms'*. They valued the time they had with their colleagues and manager and explained how they were open about what was happening as they worked and were being treated in the same organisation.

If I had an appointment, I would pop up and say hello and have a cup of tea. I quite enjoyed keeping up with the gossip and knowing what was going on. I was still very much part of the structure, and these meetings actually kept me going.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

With regards to returning to work, although once again, their line manager gave them management discretion so that *'I had a phased return to work over a couple of months'*, the employee mentioned that they were unaware if there was an official policy about returning to work and felt that there could be more communication and clarity of messaging between HR, Occupational Health and the individual. The line manager did highlight that when discussions about returning-to-work are instigated, employees are referred to Occupational Health so that a professional assessment of employee needs is undertaken and any workplace adjustments required could then be put in place. However, the line manager also recognised that some rigidities in policies existed with regards to the long-term sickness absence (especially as treatment in this case went over a year and so return-to-work discussions needed to be prolonged), and the line manager was clear that it was important to listen to the individual employee and their needs and be flexible with policy implementation where necessary to ensure the best outcome for the employee and the organisation.

I couldn't even think about going back to work as the second round of chemo was a lot worse than the first...my line manager was great, and told me to just do what I could do...

Employee with lived experience of cancer

There is some rigidity in policies, and I understand that there has to be some, but sometimes this might not be the best for everyone...It's really important to take one situation for its own independent need, because people have their own cancer journey's and have very different needs.

Line Manager

Both participants spoke about the financial worry of being away from work for treatment and recovery, and the impact that this could have on an individual's physical and mental health. The line manager took this as a priority to address, and negotiated with HR about the sick pay policy and what adjustment could be made in this situation to ensure that any stresses around finances were minimised.

One of the first thing that clicked with me was the policy about sick pay, and I knew it would be an additional worry for (the employee). So, I started talking to my line manager and HR about if a reasonable adjustment could be made. It was an enormous achievement to go back and say that they wouldn't be going without pay, and it was good to be able to influence that.

Line Manager

The other main policy that was used in this case was workplace flexibility and hybrid work. Once again, this was applied in a way that was very employee led, dependent on whether appointments were occurring, if treatment was necessary, or how the enduring side-effects left the employee feeling on a day-to-day basis. The important factor in this working successfully was clear communication so staff knew what was happening.

The treatment can consume you. It can be treatment after treatment, and all of these appointments, and sometimes you just can't work. I did take a lap-top home, and work when I thought I could.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

We adjusted the amount of time they had on-site working or working from home, including time for tests or hospital appointments, or when they didn't feel 100%...if they were exhausted after some work then I made it clear they didn't have to work anymore.

Line Manager

There was discussion about whether a dedicated working with cancer policy is necessary to support staff living and working with cancer. The employee believed that a cancer policy would be helpful so that there would be 'fairness' in how staff with cancer are treated at work, and so adjustments didn't always rely on '*line manager discretion...and because although line managers are important, they don't know everything.*' The line manager thought that there will eventually be a policy where people living with cancer will be better supported, but there may not necessarily be a specific cancer policy, but a policy that covers critical illnesses, or those with a longer-term health condition. Such a policy would better '*incorporate the eventualities that happen to people as we know that we have to take care of our people.*' Whatever the outcome, the employee argued that it is important for individuals to understand what they are entitled to from an organisation and where employees can be signposted to for further information.

Individuals need to know the facts and what they are entitled to. People need to know what the options are and find out what help they can be redirected to. You need to know what benefits that you are entitled to...these things should not be seen as just a tick box.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

Opportunities, challenges and future changes

When thinking about what worked well in the organisation to support the employee living with cancer, the clear factor was the importance of the line management relationship, their open and transparent communication, and the support that was provided. Both participants mentioned that this was aided by the fact that they had worked together over an extended period of time, and so they were more comfortable to discuss sensitive topics. Being able to keep-in-touch with management and peers was also appreciated, as well as having the flexibility to take time out for appointments, and to recuperate following certain treatments.

However, alongside this, there was also recognition that challenges do exist when managing employees living and working with cancer that need to be addressed. The line manager honestly discussed how managing the individual to ensure they get the upmost support required, as well as delivering to organisational goals can be difficult, especially when working in a pressurised environment such as the NHS.

There are a lot of pressures at work...and the challenge is that the work doesn't go away, and so you are reliant on other people stepping up as we still need our targets and everything, but at the same time you know you have to be empathetic.

Line Manager

Another challenge was being able to understand that different employees living with cancers, will have different needs, different patient journeys and treatment plans, and may approach their diagnosis in different ways, and as such there is no 'one size fits all' for managing someone living with cancer.

Everyone's treatment is different at the end of day, and it depends on how people deal with it...unless you have had some experience with cancer it can be difficult to understand also what it does to you from a mental point of view...how it affects you, the brain fog, the tiredness...it can be really scary thinking about coming back to work.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

It is for this reason that further line management developing, coaching and resources to help support line managers navigating these challenges was discussed. Both participants recognised that there is a lot of pressure put on managers in organisations without the additional challenges of managing an employee with a long-term health condition, and so the provision of increased managerial support was considered to be an important asset.

We need to give line managers the time and resources to understand, to know what a good conversation is because it is really hard to expect people to deal with something they don't know, or don't know how to behave in such situations...this could be mentoring, management training or coaching but managers need to be able to give appropriate support.

Line Manager

Managers should be given help. I do think managers need to have training and coaching in this area because it is a sensitive subject...line managers need clear pointers, but I do recognise that this is a difficult role.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

The management training would also help employers know what an employee's rights in these matters is. The employee living with cancer mentioned how it is important for both employers and individuals to know that cancer is covered under the Equality Act, so the organisation understands their legal duty of care in this context, and so an individual knows what they are able to ask for. They also believed that this would help with fairness, and how any similar circumstances could be managed in the future.

I didn't originally know that cancer is classed under the Equality Act. I found this out through another charity, and it opened my eyes to the 'rules'...I should have been told that from an HR point of view...knowledge about things like that is really important, people won't take advantage of it.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

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However, access to coaching for the individual who has experienced cancer was also seen as beneficial for future practice to enable employees to open up and help them articulate what they may need adjusting for them in both physical adjustments, but also for job design and work expectations. Having a coach was also thought to help the management of any return to work be more employee-led, so the process is seen to be more human than process driven, and supportive of employees at a time when they may be experiencing conflicting emotions and pressures.

I'm lucky as I am quite a strong person, and I did make my points to the right people, but there may be others that might not be as strong as me...things can just be read off a sheet, and be tick, tick, tick with no negotiation. If I was someone different, things could have taken me over the edge.

Employee with lived experience of cancer

The line manager agreed that taking an employee-led perspective was important, with the recognition that just because someone may have received a 'cancer free' result, it doesn't mean that they are emotionally released from what they have been through, and so employers need to be aware that the employee will still need help and support going forward.

There is an over-riding message here to listen to the person...you do need to remember that although some people do become 'cancer free' they will live with having had cancer forever. That becomes part of their journey and something that someone will never get over. We as employers need to remember that cancer is a journey.

Line Manager

Private sector creative communications agency

Participant background and context

This case study is based on interviews with two members of a private creative communications agency. The agency is a small sized enterprise comprising of just over thirty members of staff. Those involved in the case study included the finance and HR director, and client delivery director who is currently line managing an employee living and working with cancer.

The finance and HR director has been with the organisation for about 15 years and has a background in accounting. They have been working in the HR role for just over 10 years, where they have seen their remit grow and develop. They have additional support from an HR advisor for 15 hours a week to provide assistance with organisational documentation, and to act as “*a sounding board and internal support*”. Their main role focusses on policy development and legal compliance, and “*helping line managers with the roll out of any organisational plans.*” They have recently been updating a range of policies as a result of legislative changes to flexible work and carers leave.

As part of their role, they are also a member of the organisational board where the health and wellbeing of staff is seen as a collective priority. There was a recognition that health and work are inter-connected and that it is crucial that organisations recognise the stresses that work can provide. It was thought that the role of HR for helping maintain positive health and wellbeing was:

Encouraging people to speak up, and to be open and honest which will give us the opportunity to support them...for me the very key starting point is that we have an environment where people feel comfortable that they can come and speak to us...We also support the line managers and are there if they want us to get involved.

Finance and HR Director

The line manager currently supporting an employee living and working with cancer has worked in the organisation for over a decade, but in their current role of six years. As well as supporting on the delivery of large projects and managing workflow, they also manage four members of staff. Although they enjoy being a manager, they recognised that “*it is also very challenging.*” They wouldn’t want to manage any more staff as they currently felt comfortable in the level of support they were able to provide to their direct reports and “*right now I feel like I can give everyone the time when they need it.*”

Managing people can be tough sometimes because everyone has different feelings. It's important to be understanding and aware of what's going on in their lives, both at work and outside of work. But I really enjoy the satisfaction I get from this part of my job.

Line Manager

The line manager expressed that the link between work and health is “*very thin*”, but there are a number of line manager competencies and characteristics to help support employee health and wellbeing at work. Being open and honest about what line managers can do to help was seen as key, because “*employees need to know where they stand on issues.*” However, they also argued that it is important that line managers understand their employee’s role to understand what the stressors they experience are, and how they can reach out to adapt roles where necessary.

From a health and wellbeing point of view, it is something that we do have to be aware of, it should be on our radar and something that we discuss at every check in.

Line Manager

Throughout the case study, the employee living with cancer was described as “*extremely positive*”, “*very strong*” and “*driven to reach the end of the illness.*” The line manager often spoke of being led by the individual in how to best manage the situation. The employee was defined as “*having a personality like a ray of sunshine*”, and consequently when there was a change in their demeanour at work, the line manager was able to recognise that something had occurred. As a result of their strong employment relationship, the employee felt not only comfortable to disclose to the line manager, but also wanted to let the team know in their own way.

They thought it was really important that it came from their voice, and I thought that was incredibly brave...but they stood up in the office in one of the team meetings and told everyone what was going on and what they were going through. They let people know that they would be fighting it, and that there would be good weeks and bad weeks...But I mean it was incredible. And they did it, they said their piece. There was that real personal connection.

Line Manager

Organisation policies and practices

When creating policies the finance and HR director and the HR advisor develop them together and see how each policy supports or compliments other existing organisational policies. Policies are signed off by the organisation’s Board, and then rolled out to line managers for implementation.

We have quite a significant process for policy development, to ensure that we look at the organisational needs, and see how the new policy fits in with other policies. Ultimate sign off comes from the board. When it comes to implementation it depends on what the policy is, but they are usually rolled out within performance management operations, after an initial explanation to line managers. Line managers are responsible for signposting the staff to our policies.

Finance and HR Director

The line manager mentioned organisational systems are in place where the policies can be easily accessed when required, and that HR were always on hand to provide relevant information for what policies should be used and when, and to answer any queries. Although line managers are not consulted about what is included in the policy, it was noted that:

The actual policies come from HR, but we do have forums where organisational matters are regularly discussed, and so we can regularly input into discussions, and if there are concerns then we can feedback to the HR team. There really is a two-way conversation that you can pop a quick message, and you will get something back quickly.

Line Manager

When discussing what policies were used in this case, the finance and HR director was very honest in admitting that throughout managing this situation, they have had the chance to reflect where the gaps in policies are, and what they currently had that worked well.

I have been thinking about this a lot. This was our first time where we have been in this kind of situation dealing with this...so there are areas of change that we are already considering moving forward.

Finance and HR Director

One of the policies that was very beneficial was the flexible and hybrid work policy. However, in this case, it was recognised that the implementation of the policy was dependent on what was best for the individual, as *“we will always try and do the right things by our people and support them as best we can.”* Thus, when the disclosure of the cancer diagnosis was made, HR and the line manager worked together to see what could best be done, both in accordance with the Equality Act, as well as making sure the employee's stressors were not exacerbated.

Sometimes it is about the ethos of the policy and not being so rigid with them. So, in terms of the hybrid and flexible work policy we did adapt it to as much as the individual needed.

Finance and HR Director

The other policy that was of importance in this case was around organisational sick pay. The finance and HR director commented that they spent a long time working with the employee and line manager on this matter as they recognised that *“financial concerns are a massive worry”*, and they were working to ensure that the employee was not financially compromised, but in the constraints of working within a small business.

When working for a small business you might really want to be able to finance everybody's sick pay in these instances, but you can't...we do say we will act with discretion, and in this case, we did pay more than we would have normally done.

Finance and HR Director

Throughout this ongoing time, HR, the line manager and the employee have been working together to minimise the financial impact of long periods of sickness absence (in this case for both surgery and chemotherapy, which required elongated periods of time off). In this case HR found that it was best to:

Offer as much as you can from a financial perspective, however much you can pay, but also provide clarity as to what their options are. So, for example, we worked together to spread the cost of any unpaid sick days across several months which smoothed the financial impact...We also signposted them to other potential sources of support, such as charities that could provide contributions towards wigs. It was about having these discussions upfront.

Finance and HR Director

The line manager also mentioned other employee benefits and practices that were used in this case to best support the employee working with cancer. This included access to an Employee Assistance Programme, providing access to 24/7 counselling as well as 'good line manager' practices. The line manager highlighted the importance of keep-in-touch meetings, and looking at the employee's role and job design to see how this could be adapted to maintain elements of the role they enjoyed but to reduce the stress and demands they experienced.

I wanted to do everything I could to support them. We were very clear about how we wanted to communicate, and we've been checking in regularly over the past year and a half to figure out the best way to get through this together.

Line Manager

There was discussion whether a specific policy for working with cancer was beneficial. The line manager commented that 'guidance' rather than a policy would be better, as '*every cancer is different, and people are affected differently so across the board one size does not fit all*'. They suggested that something along the lines of a FAQ sheet for managers to read and digest and know where to ask for further questions would be beneficial. The finance and HR director mentioned that, as there are a range of other long-term health conditions that could have an impact on employees, then it could be more sensible to:

In the first instance it may be more important to look at a more general critical illness policy, which would pick up cancer, but also other conditions. This will also provide a bit of concrete understanding about what we can commit to financially but also other benefits that we could offer.

Finance and HR Director

Opportunities, challenges and future changes

Both participants recognised challenges that organisations and managers can face when managing someone at work with cancer. The first common challenge was the uncertainty in how long the treatment was going to take, and how employees react to their treatment. The finance and HR director recognised that because of the unpredictability of chemotherapy and radiotherapy side-effects, '*longer-term considerations and plans need to be put in place*'. In this case, working alongside the individual there was a rhythm of "*good and bad patches*" of fatigue and wellbeing experienced by the employee living with cancer, dependent on where they were in the chemotherapy cycle. However, there have been times when a reaction to the medication has been worse than others, and so being able to respond to this flexibly was sometimes a challenge that the line manager had to be aware of.

I knew from conversations that the week after chemo can be challenging and they don't know whether it is going to be a great week, or an extremely tired week, it just depended on how their body reacted to what is going on in it....so we have had to try and put pieces in place so that we are able to react to this well.

Line Manager

The finance and HR director and the line manager discussed how this uncertainty did lead to tensions in how they could remain sensitive and empathetic to the employee working with cancer and the recognition that their health remained a priority, but at the same time ensure that business projects and targets were being completed. There was the understanding that work was crucial for the individual (not just financially, but it provided a sense of purpose), but working in an SME meant that the division of labour still had to be spread equally between the remaining team members.

We know that work is crucial for them, and we want to enable them to have that normality as much as they can as they are going through treatment. But from a business perspective the issues are two-fold. Firstly, it's making sure that you still reduce any stress on the individual, but secondly, particularly for a small business, you have to be sensible and try and plan especially because that individual may not be around for a long period of time."

Finance and HR Director

We have to try and get a picture of how the week or month is looking for them. Balancing the work commitments and to try and support with some parameters. As we are a small business we have think about the needs of the individual and the business.

Line Manager

Associated with this was challenge of managing emotions and performance management, in an already difficult and emotional situation. The HR director discussed how the employee working with cancer often reported feeling 'frustrated' if they were unable to undertake or complete a task, or keep up with the pressure of client demands, and how that needed to be carefully managed:

They will say to me in our meetings that they didn't want to be a burden to anyone and didn't want to feel like their colleagues were having to pick up on any mistakes because of chemo brain and being a bit foggy. Issues like that frustrate the hell out of them...Now it is our responsibility to enable them to continue to contribute, but also to make sure that they are not on a hiding to nothing and that they are trying to do something that just isn't realistic in the circumstances they are facing.

Finance and HR Director

The line manager recognised this as a challenge and was keen to try and look at the demands of the role, to ensure that they were still involved in projects and clients that they were interested and excited to be working with but balancing that with stress and the timeliness of project demands.

We have been looking at their workload together, trying to balance stressful work situations, whilst keeping work interesting. In a busy agency, certain projects can be quite stressful if they have hard deadlines or pressurised moments through a project. Keeping conversations flowing throughout is key.

Line Manager

However, managing their reactions to the diagnosis disclosure and ongoing treatment has also been a challenge. Both the finance and HR director and the line manager reported “*ending up in tears in meetings at some point*” and describing having to put their own emotions aside to be there to support the employee. Although they were very much strengthened by the approach and attitude of the employee living and working with cancer, it still triggered emotions with them especially as they had their own experiences of cancer.

People will react differently. But it can be difficult to read and hear things and digest things. Should I not show emotion? Should I try and be this stoic person? Because there are all these things going on, and some of the team members have already gone through it.

Line Manager

Even with these recognised challenges, there was evidence of good practice that enabled the employee to work when they felt well enough to do so. Both the finance and HR director and the line manager agreed that the level of openness and support they were able to provide the employee was key to having a successful approach. Keep-in-touch meetings were very employee-led and undertaken at a time that was best suited to them. At some points these were solely with the line manager, but the HR director was keen to show their support as and when required.

I think we had good communication with (the employee). It was driven by them initially, but then it has very much been a two-way flow of information. I have been able to take a step back to enable the line manager to deal with it, but they know that I am here and I will go and get an update.

Finance and HR Director

The line manager agreed that through having an open and ‘safe space’ with the employee they were able to remove any organisational pressures that the employee may have been experiencing. The line manager was also aware that the ‘journey’ was not yet finished, and the support will be available as and when the employee needs it.

I think we have been positive from an emotional and supportive point. We are still on the journey with them from a team perspective. We do not forget what they are going through even if they are having a good week

Line Manager

They also felt that being open and honest with what they were able to provide in terms of financial support was also important. Although there was an element of guilt at not being able to do anymore (due to organisational economic circumstances), the flexible approach to work schedules and times of payments, made a difficult situation a lot easier.

There was openness and transparency on both sides, especially about the financial element. There was a bit of guilt from that perspective, but I was very clear early on about what we could and could not do and laid out the options and said that we would do what we can. But I think the fact that we were open and transparent and really proactive about looking at ways through which we could support their financial position, that was important.

Finance and HR Director

The line manager also mentioned other factors they thought helped to support the employee. The first was having flexibility in where they worked, work patterns and, as discussed above, work role. This meant that the employee did not feel pressured to work when feeling particularly unwell, or when they were experiencing side effects from their treatment.

We were very flexible, and we do offer hybrid work. But we realised that we did have to act a bit more flexibly than usual. We suggested days that could be good to come in, and in the days following the chemo we allow them time to 'feel normal' instead of having to feel the pressure of working straight away. We emphasised that they could give themselves that bit of flexibility, if they are feeling tired. So, we do have that in place.

Line Manager

Training was also offered to the line manager to help support them in their role, and line manager training is refreshed regularly. The line manager mentioned that they received a 'suite of training materials' that support line managers to have difficult conversations, open conversations and help to performance manage successfully. The manager also mentioned that the organisational director is proactive in providing line manager training and coaching when deemed necessary, which was seen as influential in this case.

The support provided by the finance and HR director to the line manager was also seen as an organisational practice that worked well. The line manager knew that they would be available for information about relevant policies and practices, or time to 'download'.

I knew that they would ask me about how I was doing in my one-to-ones, that they would check in on me and see if there was anything that I would like to share. I took this as a time for me to feedback anything on the process or how I was doing.

Line Manager

As this was the first time they had ever had an experience of managing someone with cancer, both respondents recognised the challenges that they had to overcome, and the steps forward that they could make should this occur again.

Did we put stuff in place? Did we help? Are we still helping them? I think we are. I'm quite confident that if we asked them tomorrow if we could have done anything more, they would say 'yep you've done everything that you could have done'. So that is good.

Line Manager

When thinking about what else could be done in the future to better support employees living with cancer, both respondents recognised that more could be done to help line managers manage a 'cancer situation', with the understanding that, in a small

organisation, a number of staff could be affected (either emotionally or through changes in workload). There was an underestimation on the impact that managing an employee can have, and the provision of training or a more coherent support network was viewed as needed going forward.

You don't realise the full impact things like this can have on a line manager. So, I think it had definitely flagged that one of my key things is to better support them. Develop an overt network. I think there has been support in a more informal way. But from an HR perspective there does need to be more in terms of ensuring that they get support, check-in more and make sure that they have a space to download.

Finance and HR Director

The line manager added that when the cancer was disclosed, they were unaware of what actions to take, and so following on from this experience they should undertake a 'catch-all' consultation process to understand where policies and practices could have been implemented more quickly or effectively. They also recognised that it is imperative that they have time to reflect on the process.

I think I need a bit of time to digest what has happened and what is going on with the team, so that if it does happen again, I can make sure that my head is in the right place to help and support. I think this is probably beneficial for anyone going forward dealing with this. I think more support offered is always helpful, even if it is just a six-month checkpoint, because these things are emotionally draining, especially if you have a personal lived experience.

Line Manager

The line manager had a number of suggestions as to what form further support could take, including the provision of a mentor or a buddy system, an employer network and coaching to get some '*professional advice*' about how to appropriately manage an employee working with cancer. Both participants recognised that, with the potential for one in two people receiving a cancer diagnosis, this is an issue that they will continue to improve to help tighten organisations practices for the future.

Inclusive Terminology

The terminology used to define ethnicity continues to evolve, and greater awareness has arisen about gender, cognitive differences as well as of disability. IES seeks to be a learning organisation; as such we are adapting our practice in line with these shifts. We aim to be specific when referring to each individual's ethnicity and use their own self-descriptor wherever possible. Where this is not feasible, we are aligned with Race Disparity Unit (RDU) which uses the term 'ethnic minorities' to refer to all ethnic groups except white British. RDU does not use the terms BAME (black, Asian, and minority ethnic) or BME (black and minority ethnic) as these terms emphasise certain ethnic groups and exclude others. It also recommends not capitalising ethnic groups, (such as 'black' or 'white') unless that group's name includes a geographic place. More broadly, we understand that while individuals may have impairments it is society that disables them, hence we refer to disabled people. Not all people identify with male or female and we reflect their self-descriptions in our work and use the term non-binary should abbreviation be necessary. We value neurodiversity. Where possible we always use people's self-descriptors rather than impose categories upon them.

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