

# **Empowerment of Patients Regarding Employment**

I hereby state that I have no conflicts of interest to declare

**ESMO – Wien 2012**

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# The main findings of an ECL Survey

- A need for special considerations at the work place when returning to work
- A need for employers to know that cancer diseases can vary in duration – and that the impact may last longer than 1 year
- A need for health and social authorities to accept and make the laws reflect that a cancer disease can last longer than 1 year



# Cancer Patients and Employment

3.2 mio. Europeans are diagnosed with cancer every year

1.3 mio. are of working age, i.e. between 15 and 64 years

Globocan 2008, International Agency for Research on Cancer (WHO)



# Return to work

The return rate for employed cancer patients ranges from 30 to 93 %

Important risk factors for losing one's job are

- Diagnosis
- Age
- Work accommodation
- Level of social compensation
- Co-morbidity

Source: Tamminga SJ, Enhancing return to work of cancer patients. PhD Thesis from University of Amsterdam, Holland 2012



# Case 1 - a woman of 29 years

A young woman who worked at a bank was on sick leave for 6 months after her treatment for uterus cancer. She was afraid to lose her job and very anxious to get back on full time as soon as possible.

But she suffered from late effects – tiredness, loss of confidence and moods. She was close to a depression when the company offered her a return-to-work plan. It included a gradual return to normal hours and an adjustment of her tasks with no direct contact to the customers.

Within 4 months she was back on full time and after another 2 months she picked up her former tasks.



## Case 2 – a woman of 42 years

A tool maker had an operation and chemo for her breast cancer. She was on sick leave for about a year afterwards.

She returned to work starting out very slowly with a few hours. In order to avoid lymph edema special appliances that could help the woman to lift heavy items was installed - the equipment was largely paid for by the local job center.

The woman quickly increased her working hours, after 6 months she was back on full time and also took on most of her former tasks again.



# Work with the employers !



Not knowing what to do is a core problem. And this is where cancer leagues can really help – especially the many smaller companies who don't have a big HR staff to help them deal with the difficult situations





# Three issues are useful for employers

1. Knowledge



2. Suggestions for concrete realistic actions

3. A formal policy as guidance in future situations



# Knowledge is vital



- It can reduce insecurity and fear
- It can prevent unrealistic expectations
- It can improve the help given to employees returning to work
- It can minimize prejudice about cancer



# Suggestions for concrete actions

## **An early meeting is mandatory**

- a possibility to show concerned interest
- to exchange information about the treatment and about the company policy for serious illness, and
- to agree upon the type and frequency of contact during treatment and recovery
- to agree upon what information should be given to the colleagues



# Concrete actions during treatment and recovery

Advice about how to handle the contact with the sick employee

Work through the disease? Discuss wishes and possibilities for working part time or from home

Offer information about possible subsidies or other types of help offered by social authorities or employment services

Advice about paying attention to the group of close co-workers



# Concrete actions at return to work

## **A meeting before the employee's return is mandatory**



Exchange information about the health status including side effects and possible late effects

Discuss mutual expectations

Discuss the possibilities to return on a gradual basis

Discuss possible adjustments of working hours and work load



# A FORMAL POLICY



A formal company policy has substantial advantages

- Considered and carefully prepared actions are usually more beneficial for both management and the employee
- It minimizes the insecurity of the manager / line manager about what to do in a difficult situation
- It minimizes the insecurity of the sick employee – as well as of all the other employees
- A policy is a clear signal of social responsibility



# Free tools are available



The Danish Cancer Society has published a handbook for employers, 'When an Employee Develops Cancer'. You can find the English and the French translation on ECL's website

[www.europeancancerleagues.org](http://www.europeancancerleagues.org)

Macmillan in UK has developed a tool 'Working Through Cancer' for employers,

[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)



# Working on a national level

Important stakeholders are:

- Cancer Leagues
- Ministries of Health – Employment - Social Affairs
- The Trade Unions
- Employers' Associations
- Pension Funds
- The 'leading' companies





Offering help to the managers is really worth doing – first and foremost because it is so utterly important for so many cancer patients to keep their jobs.

It may take a lot of work, but don't give up, remember what Albert Einstein said:

“It's not that I'm so very smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer ”

