

# WORKING THROUGH CANCER

## Surveying experiences of cancer and work

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### Background

There is increasing recognition that work is an outcome for people living with and beyond cancer. There are currently 890,000 people of working age living with cancer and this is set to increase to 1,150,000 by 2030<sup>1</sup>. As the population of working age people with cancer increases it is important to ensure that people living with cancer (PLWC) get the support they need to remain in or return to work when they are ready and able to. However, there is limited quantitative data exploring people's experiences of work after a cancer diagnosis nor of employers' experiences of managing employees with cancer. Macmillan has therefore undertaken two surveys to baseline the needs of people living with cancer and employer perceptions of work and cancer to help improve the services and support it provides.

### Methods

Macmillan undertook a survey of 1507 people who were working at the time of their cancer diagnosis and 1012 line managers who manage between 1-100 employees. The questions were designed to explore perceptions of work and cancer, experiences and awareness of workplace interventions. Fieldwork was conducted between 29th June to 22nd July 2018. The survey was hosted by YouGov<sup>2,3</sup>.

### Results

Findings from the survey show that staying in or returning to work is important to people living with cancer (87%). Although financial pressures (54%) are a motivation, the most popular reasons for returning to work are to give a sense of normality (62%) or to keep positive, keep up morale, or self-esteem (55%).

Despite the positive benefits of returning to work following cancer many PLWC face barriers. 1 in 5 (20%) people who return to work after their diagnosis face discrimination at work. More than a fifth of PLWC go into work despite not feeling well enough to be there (23%) and 18% return to work before feeling ready to do so. One reason for this could be that PLWC are unaware of their rights following a cancer diagnosis. 57% of people working at the time of their cancer diagnosis know that the Equality Act and Disability Discrimination Act (Northern Ireland) covers cancer while only 51% know that their employer has a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments to help them remain in or return to work when they are ready and able.

In addition, line managers do not always feel they have the right support or training to help PLWC return to work. 86% of line managers have not been given any training on how to support people with long term conditions, including cancer. Only a third (36%) of line managers feel well equipped to support employees with cancer.

### Conclusion

Staying in or returning to work after cancer is increasingly important as cancer incidence and survival rates rise and more people are able to remain in or return to the workplace after their diagnosis. Findings from the PLWC survey show that many don't understand their rights at work and don't get the support they need, while the line managers survey suggests that employers are not always equipped to support them properly. This highlights the need to increase awareness of rights following a cancer diagnosis and to provide employers with support to help them meet the needs of their employees with cancer. This research has played a vital role in supporting Macmillan to develop better information and support to help PLWC remain in or return to work.



**87%** of people employed when diagnosed with cancer say it was important to continue working after their diagnosis

**Of those who said it was important:**

**62%** say it gives them a sense of normality

**55%** say it helps keep them positive

**54%** needed the money

**Over half** (51%) of people with cancer don't know that employers have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments for them



**1 IN 5** people with cancer who returned to work after their diagnosis faced discrimination at work

#### References

1. Estimated total prevalence of cancer among people in the UK aged 16 to 65. Based on UK complete prevalence of those aged 0 to 64 in 2010 and 2015 derived from Maddams J, Uitley M, Moller H. Projections of cancer prevalence in the United Kingdom, 2010-2040. Br J Cancer 2012; 107: 1195-1202. (Projections scenario 1). This was adjusted up to those aged 16 to 65 based on proportions in 21-year cancer prevalence in England (Transforming Cancer Services Team for London, NHS, National Cancer Registry and Analysis Service, PHE and Macmillan Cancer Support, 2017. Cancer Prevalence in England: 21-year prevalence by demographic and geographic measures. <http://www.ncin.org.uk/view?rid=3579>). The 890,000 is higher than the numbers in Cancer Prevalence in England: 21-year prevalence by demographic and geographic measures as the 890,000 covers the whole of the UK rather than just England. It is also based on people alive in 2015 with a cancer diagnosis any time in the past rather than those alive in 2015 with a cancer diagnosis in the last 21 years.

2. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1507 PLWC who were employed at the time of diagnosis. Fieldwork was undertaken between 29/06/2018 – 22/07/2018. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted by region.

3. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1012 line managers. Fieldwork was undertaken between 29/06/2018 – 11/07/2018. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of line managers in the UK.

#### Notes

A. "Have you experienced any of the below whilst working as a result of your cancer diagnosis?" respondents then selected various options including their employer not making reasonable adjustments and feeling bullied or harassed for a reason connected with their cancer. For the purposes of this survey we defined those who ticked one of these options as having experienced discrimination.

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