Sickness absence guide for managers
The Big Picture

There is a clear link between healthy and happy staff and improved patient outcomes. We are looking to be a world class organisation. Therefore we need to be at the forefront in improving employee wellbeing.

The proactive management of sickness absence is vital to improving the health and wellbeing of our staff and improving organisational efficiency. Each employee has a responsibility to ensure regular attendance at work. In this Trust we recognise that staff will be absent from time to time. Over the past 3 years we have introduced a number of initiatives that actively work to reduce the need to be absent and ensuring staff who are absent have as much support as possible for their recovery and successful return to work.

Managers are the most important factor in providing support to staff and improving organisational effectiveness. Managers are vital in a number of areas such as the monitoring and recording of sickness absence, supporting staff and working to provide an open and honest environment. If not proactively managed, sickness absence can have a real effect on the level and quality of the care we provide as an organisation and have considerable cost implications.

There are also considerable gains to be had by improving our performance in this area. In addition to improving the quality of our service we will be working to reduce the levels of sickness absence pay paid out by the Trust. In 2014 this amounted to £8,711,254.72.

This guide has been devised to assist managers in this vital task.

Your Responsibilities for Managing Your Staff

All managers have a responsibility to create an effective and professional environment. There are several interventions managers can make to encourage good human resources practice. These include:

• Supporting - ask “How are you?” . Listen when your employees ask for help, be flexible and considerate.
• Communicating - help your employees with what they need to do in their job and encourage them to talk to you about work issues and about health issues too. The appraisal window is an ideal opportunity to do this but action in this area should take place throughout the year.
• Consulting - ask employees for their views and involve them in your decisions.
• Healthy workplace - keep your workplace healthy and safe for employees.
• Monitoring employees - make it your business to know that employees are healthy and feel well. Keep sickness absence records for your staff, e.g. who is off sick, when and for how long. Ensure that the correct reason for any sickness is recorded on ESR.
• Being pro-active - look at your records regularly so you can identify problems and then take appropriate action to solve them. Look for any trends in the data.
• Supporting sick employees - to help them return to work, consider temporary reasonable adjustments as part of a phased return to normal duties if recommended by Occupational Health or the Trust Staff therapy Service.
• Investing - you will usually get a good return on any money or time you spend on health and wellbeing at work. There is a correlation between taking part in health and wellbeing activities and lowering sickness absence.
• Training – As a Trust we offer a range of training to help managers to be pro-active when managing sickness absence and encouraging employees back to work.
• Lead by example - be a good role model by looking after your own health and well-being and your employees will follow.
• Keep staff informed - make your employees aware about health issues by including them in the information and advice you give out in the workplace. Ensure these issues are discussed at team meetings.

The Business Benefits of Promoting Employee Health and Wellbeing

The business case for promoting health, wellbeing and engagement is clear. A healthy, engaged and resilient workforce is more productive. There is an acknowledged link in the NHS that improvement in these areas leads to improved patient outcomes. It is not just desirable to improve our health and wellbeing; it is essential for society, our workforce and organisational effectiveness.

• All employers have a legal duty of care to their employees. Simple measures to prevent and manage ill-health can lead to a decrease in employee absence.
• Healthy working environments can contribute to reduced employee absence through sickness and stress.
• Employees who feel cared for are often more satisfied and perform better, which can have the effect of reducing staff turnover and increasing productivity.
• Getting employees back into work after illness reduces the loss of experienced staff and the cost of recruiting new staff.
• Being known as an organisation that cares about its employees can enhance your reputation and help to attract staff and patients.

Employee Absence Due to Conflict at Work – Managing Unauthorised Absence.

• An employee may be absent because of conflict at work. This absence could either be in the form of sick leave or unauthorised and unexplained leave.
• With any type of absence the employee may telephone you to explain what has caused it or you may have to call the employee instead.
• If you find out that an employee’s absence is being caused by a conflict at work, you need to take steps to resolve it immediately.
• However, the employee might just tell you that they are suffering from stress or depression. If so, you should try to find out, even if it’s not immediately clear what the underlying cause is.
• With unauthorised absence, the employee may be reluctant to tell you why they are absent. For example, they might either avoid giving you an explanation or give you an explanation that you find unconvincing. In either case, either you should raise it as a point for discussion during the return-to-work interview. If the absence is on-going, invite the employee in for a wellbeing meeting with the purpose of establishing the underlying cause of their absence to then decide with them upon the best course of action.
Return to Work Interviews

Carrying out a return to work interview is a central to improving the management of sickness absence in our Trust. This is why return to work interviews continue to be audited by Business Human Resources. Areas that fail to action these issues in a timely manner will be reported on and an explanation sought. Whenever an employee returns to work after a period of absence, you should hold a return-to-work interview with them immediately. The discussion should include:

• Welcome the employee back and check they are well enough to be at work. Ask the person to complete the Self Certification form.
• If the absence spanned over 7 days, check that a Fit to Work note has been submitted by the employee.
• Update them on any news while they were absent
• Establish the cause of their absence. Explore any potential links to issues at work, for example, relationship issues with other colleagues, performance problems.
• Discuss all possible options to resolve any issues to provide any relevant support needed for the individual’s successful return to work.
• If the absence has been due to stress, the manager should have already communicated with the employee about the range of support we have that’s available. A further discussion should now take place and include opportunities for counselling and training.
• If you are already aware that the absence was caused by a conflict at work, you should inform the employee about the steps that you have taken to resolve it. Discuss Mediation with the individual as a possible option. For further information, consider a referral into the Trust’s Mediation for Staff which is provided by Mersey Care or discuss this issue with Business HR.

Managing Continuing Absence During a Disciplinary Procedure

Although many situations can be challenging, proactive and effective management in this area is essential to improve organisational effectiveness. If you think an employee’s continuing absence is due to a forthcoming disciplinary hearing which they fail to attend you should:

• Seek advice from Occupational Health on the individual’s fitness to take part in a disciplinary hearing. This will require a referral to Occupational Health.
• If the advice is that the individual is not currently fit to take part in a hearing, hold any further action until they are deemed fit to proceed.
• Providing the individual is well enough to attend a hearing, rearrange the date of the meeting.
• Advise the employee that if they fail to attend the re-arranged hearing, the hearing may proceed in their absence and a decision on the matter could be made without considering their input.

Don’t forget you have the support of the Business HR team. Know the HR manager and HR Advisor for your area.
Contractual obligations

Managing health, work and wellbeing is the responsibility of both the employer and the employee.

The Trust has a duty to ensure that the work environment is safe and conducive to good health and wellbeing and employees also have a duty to ensure that they keep their work environment and themselves safe and that they make every effort to keep themselves well.

The Trust does not wish its employees to attend for work when they are not fit to do so however, the Trust expects all employees to account for their absences and to meet their contractual obligations to work. Staff absences have a direct effect on service delivery to the people of Liverpool and represent a significant cost to the organisation.

Everything You Need to Know About Sickness Absence

There is a good deal of support to assist managers in the management of sickness absence. NHS Employers have devised a useful series of guides that will enable busy managers to effectively deal with a number of situations. The NHS Employer guides can be accessed through the following link: http://www.nhsemployers.org/your-workforce/retain-and-improve/staff-experience/health-work-and-wellbeing/action-on-absence/everything-you-need-to-know-about-sickness-absence

These pages cover a number of individual issues with handy “30 Second” guides. These include:
- When staff call in Sick
- Frequent Sickness
- Long Term Sickness
- Reasons for Absence
- Staff Off Sick
- Returning to Work
- Preventing Absence

Support Available in This Trust.

Over the past three years we have increased the range and depth available to staff to support and improve employment. The following initiatives are only examples of the support available. Managers should be familiar with the Trust Staff Hub pages which can be accessed through the following link: http://rl-faq.nhs.sitedit.net/wellbeing/health-and-wellbeing.htm

**Staff Support Service** – We have a 24/7 access to a Staff Support Service. Staff who call 0151 330 8103 will be given confidential support. In many cases counselling can be offered. The vast majority of staff can access counselling in just a few days.

**Training** – We understand that it can often be difficult to take time to attend training. However, time spent training and understanding issues can reap benefits in the long term. We have developed a range of training opportunities and these include:
- Modular Training for Line Managers that includes specific absence and disciplinary management training.
- Managing Your Own Personal Stress
- Healthy Worker
• Understanding Mental Health Issues – during the coming months we are looking to offer this short introduction to these issues.

Staff Therapy Service – We have a full service for staff in our Trust. The service takes referrals from individuals, staff and occupational health service. You can access this service through the following link: [http://rl-faq.nhs.sitekit.net/wellbeing/staff-therapy-service.htm](http://rl-faq.nhs.sitekit.net/wellbeing/staff-therapy-service.htm)

Weight Management – Trust Dieticians provide a Weight Loss Challenge on both sites. Staff have weekly opportunity to be weighed and get dietary advice.

Physical Activity – We offer a comprehensive range of physical activity programmes in our workplace including:
- Pilates
- Dancercise
- Tai Chi
- Yoga
- Insanity Workout.

Alcohol Issues – We recognise that there is a occasional link between sickness absence issues and our relationship with alcohol. In this Trust we run regular “Love Your Liver” clinics. We also have access to the Liverpool Community Alcohol Service team on 0151 795 5395. Managers, colleagues and staff can ring this number to get advice and support.

Smoking – These issues are covered in our “Be Clear on Smoking” document. Staff have access to smoking cessation from Roy Castle Fag Ends. Staff can contact Ext 2332 to get help to quit or advice for patients and visitors.

Communication – It is important for all managers to be fully aware of the wide range of support available for them and their staff. The best way to do this is to have access to the information available. This includes:
- Your Monthly Health and Wellbeing Update
- Weekly In touch
- Monthly Team Brief
- Regular emails.

Associated policies:

We recognise that sickness absence is an issue that covers a number of areas and requires managers to be aware of a range of action they need to take. There are a number of important policies that you need to be aware of and can be helpful including:
- Managing Sickness Absence policy
- Managing Stress of Work policy
- Disciplinary policy
- Alcohol and Substance Misuse policy
- Whistleblowing policy
Useful contacts:

• Staff Support Service 0151 330 8103
• Occupational Health Service 0151 529 3803
• Liverpool Community Alcohol Specialist Nurses 0151 795 5395
• Human Resources Advisor ext...................
• Human Resources Business Partner ext ..................