

Helping Your Employee Navigate Cancer in the Workplace

This year, more than 1.8 million new cases of cancer are expected to be diagnosed in the United States. But thanks to advancements in cancer research and treatment, more people than ever are surviving and can return to their normal lives after their diagnosis. As an employer, this means it is possible that an employee will be diagnosed with cancer and will come to you for help navigating the inevitable changes at work.

While each workplace has its own culture and policies, there are still important things you can do to help support your employee who has cancer. If one of your employees tells you about a diagnosis, the following are a few things to keep in mind:

- **Let them take the lead.** What and how much the employee shares are personal decisions. Let the employee establish his or her personal boundaries first, then ask the employee if or how the team should be informed.
- **Guide the office response.** Sometimes heartfelt gestures, like raising money for medical costs or dropping by the patient's house with food, can be much appreciated, but in other instances it can make the patient feel uncomfortable. It's important to relay the patient's privacy wishes and help guide an appropriate office-wide response.
- **Make workplace adjustments.** Fatigue, severe pain, and illness are all potential side effects of treatment that your employee may be facing. Making simple changes, such as moving the employee's workspace closer to the restroom or providing a more comfortable chair, can help the employee feel at ease in their work environment and remove unnecessary stress.
- **Make a plan.** If your employee is going through cancer treatment, they may need to adjust their schedule to take time to recover, including reduced hours, more frequent breaks, or working from home some days. It's mutually beneficial to create a written plan for how work will be handled while the employee is out of the office.
- **Review company policies and benefits.** There are several work policies that may affect your employee, so familiarize yourself with the company's benefits, policies, and services, such as employee assistance program (EAP) services, so that you can provide the necessary guidance.
- **Discuss health insurance changes.** Your employee's health insurance needs may change based on their treatment plan, which will likely take time to navigate. Helping the employee map out their options and calling their health insurance company is a good first step.
- **Know their rights.** Have a good understanding of your employee's rights under federal laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), as these laws may be applicable to your employee.

As an employer, it isn't easy when a team member receives a cancer diagnosis, and it's natural to want to help. Consider some caring ways your entire office can support an employee with cancer and make them feel like a valued member of the team.



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