

Advising Patients About Work

GPs ARE IN A UNIQUE POSITION TO PROVIDE PATIENTS WITH EVIDENCE-BASED ADVICE ABOUT WORK

For most adults of working age, including people with disabilities and many common health problems, there is strong evidence¹ that (return to) work:

- promotes recovery and aids rehabilitation
- improves physical and mental health and well-being
- reduces social exclusion and poverty

The beneficial effects of work generally outweigh any risks of work

There is strong evidence¹ that long periods out of work can cause or contribute to:

- higher consultation, medication consumption and hospital admission rates
- 2 to 3 times increased risk of poor general health
- 2 to 3 times increased risk of mental health problems
- 20% excess mortality

*The longer anyone is off work, the lower their chances of getting back to work.*²

Sickness certification is a major clinical intervention with potentially serious long-term consequences.³

Two-thirds of sickness absence, long-term incapacity and ill-health retirement is now due to 'common health problems' – mild/moderate mental health, musculoskeletal and cardio-respiratory conditions. Much of this should be preventable.⁴

Common health problems can often be accommodated at work, if necessary with appropriate adjustments and support.⁵

Planning and supporting return to work, in partnership with patients, are important parts of clinical management.²

REFERENCES

1. Waddell G, Burton AK. Is work good for your health and well-being? London: TSO, 2006.
2. *The health and work handbook*. Faculty of Occupational Medicine, Royal College of General Practitioners, Society of Occupational Medicine, London. www.facocmed.ac.uk/librarydocs/h&w.pdf
3. IB204: Medical evidence for statutory sick pay, statutory maternity pay and social security incapacity benefit purposes – a guide for registered medical practitioners. www.dwp.gov.uk/medicalmedicalib204
4. Waddell G, Aylward M. The scientific and conceptual basis of incapacity benefits. London: The Stationery Office, 2005.
5. *Managing sickness absence and return to work: An employers' and managers' guide*. London:HSE, 2004

RESOURCES FOR PATIENTS:

1. *Health & Work* – a self-help booklet for patients. www.tso.co.uk/bookshop
2. *Off work sick and worried about your job?* – an HSE booklet for patients. www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg397.pdf