Response to Good Work: the Taylor Review of Modern Working practice

Faculty of Occupational Medicine

Society of Occupational Medicine

Overview

The Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM) & the Society of Occupational (SOM) welcome the focus this report brings on 'good work'.

We remind the government of its own report 'Is work good for your health and well-being' Waddell & Burton (2006). The evidence suggests that, in terms of promoting health and well-being, the characteristics that distinguish 'good' jobs and 'good' workplaces might include:

- safety
- fair pay
- social gradients in health
- job security
- personal fulfilment and development; investing in human capital
- accommodating, supportive & non-discriminatory
- control/autonomy
- job satisfaction
- good communications

We agree there does need to be "a more proactive approach to workplace health."

But we feel it is important these recommendations are reviewed in light of the current activity in the government's own Work and Health Unit.

Importance of robust evidence-based statements on work

The report states: "'Working longer hours increases the risk of occupational illness (such as stress and mental health problems)."

In the absence of a citation we do not recognise this simplistic correlation. There are a number of complex, interrelated factors effecting risks of occupational illness, including of course type of work undertaken.

Fit for Work

As we have previously said the government cannot rely solely on services, such as Fit for Work, delivered remotely from the patient, workplace and the community – or one stop shops expecting employers to spend hours proactively sifting through

generic information. These have not inspired confidence from individuals or inspired changes in employer recruitment behaviour.

Individuals need conversations with trusted health professionals who understand their complex medical needs and can refer to a range of support services, medical and non-medical. Employers need direct, individualised and concise advice on how to support in the workplace disabled people and people with long-term health conditions.

So we question the recommendation on page 99 which says;

"This right to return should be conditional on engagement with the Fit for Work Service when an assessment has been recommended."

Our members, on the whole, feel Fit for Work is not working.

Modern occupational health with embedded case management and proximity to employers who can effect adjustments to work is key in supporting work retention and restoration for those with disability and long term ill health. But there are challenges to implementation, including lack of access to occupational health (OH) services, which are currently provided by (only some) employers. Moreover, the current Fit for Work service is not functioning as envisaged, and referral rates from GPs are very low.

Therefore, policy should focus on steps to build capacity and rapid access to modern occupational health advice. Action is needed to implement a new tiered approach, which delivers consistent generic vocational advice for all patients but concentrates occupational health expertise on the most complex cases. This new model could be funded partly by replacing the Fit for Work service and re-modelling NHS OH services or commissioning local OH services.

We also feel this model would provide significant savings to government spending. 300,000 people every year fall out of work through sickness and find themselves on benefits. This is a travesty for the individuals, their families (impacted financially) and economy, costing the country £13 billion a year on health-related benefits.

A safety net at work

We welcome the focus in the report on "ways for people who are self-employed or engaging in other non-traditional labour market activity to gain access to a range of non-statutory benefits and protections." There is exciting emerging work in the construction industry on access to occupational health and we would encourage this is reviewed and if successful promoted to other industries.

Ends

For further information, please contact the Head of Communications and Policy,

The Faculty of Occupational Medicine is the professional and educational body for occupational medicine in the United Kingdom. It seeks to ensure the highest standards in the practice of occupational medicine, overseeing the continuing professional development and revalidation of its members. It is also focused on promoting and supporting health at work, with its mission statement being 'to drive improvement in the health of the working age population.

The Society of Occupational Medicine is the UK organisation for all doctors and other healthcare professionals working in or with an interest in occupational health. It is concerned with the protection of the health of people in the workplace, the prevention of occupational injuries and disease and related environmental issues.