

Healthy staff, healthier patients

Physiotherapy's role in keeping the NHS fit for work

Staff sickness absence in the NHS not only diverts vital funds away from frontline services, it can also lead to cancelled appointments, longer waiting times and poorer outcomes for patients.

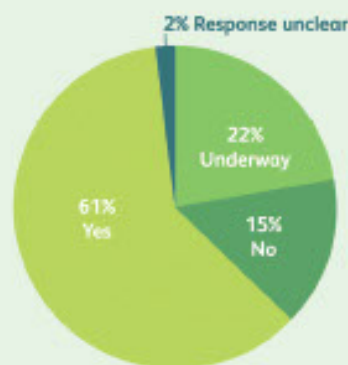
The Boorman Review, published in 2009, said the NHS could save £555m a year by introducing effective health and wellbeing strategies and giving staff rapid access to physiotherapy and other occupational health services.

But a Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) analysis of the progress made in implementing the Boorman recommendations revealed many NHS trusts still have more work to do to protect the wellbeing of their employees and improve patient care.

Fact

- More than a third of the 163 trusts that responded to a CSP freedom of information request admitted to not having a staff health and wellbeing strategy in place (see pie chart)
- Trusts without strategies saw sick pay rise by 14 percent in the past three years, as opposed to four percent for those with a plan in place
- Taking into account only the trusts that responded, the total amount spent by these NHS trusts on sick pay in the past three years exceeded £1 billion.

Percentage of NHS trusts that have developed a strategy for staff health and wellbeing in the past three years



Fact

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), such as back, neck and joint pain are one of the biggest causes of time off, accounting for 40 percent of all sickness absence in the NHS. Yet they are easy to address with low cost and effective physiotherapy interventions.

Case study

York Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust cut its long-term sickness rates by more than 40 percent through early intervention with physiotherapy and psychotherapy. The number of staff off work for more than four weeks dropped from 99 to 57 and the number off sick for more than three months dropped from 52 to 28. The trust's return on investment was 2:1

Investing now in good occupational health services, including physiotherapy, can bring NHS trusts a range of benefits:

- Improved patient care, delivered by fit, healthy and motivated staff
- Lower waiting times as a result of fewer cancelled appointments
- Reduced sickness absence and the associated costs of temporary staff
- Savings which could potentially be invested in enhancing patient care.

High quality occupational health services



Physiotherapy works

by keeping people healthy and productive at work

Employee ill-health and sickness absence is a major drain on the UK's productivity. Physiotherapy plays a vital role in keeping people healthy and able to work.

Figures from the Health and Safety executive (HSE) show that in 2011/12:

- 22.7 million working days were lost to work-related illness/injury
- Musculoskeletal disorders and stress, depression or anxiety accounted for the majority of days lost due to work-related ill health at 7.5 and 10.4 million days respectively
- And that in 2010/11, workplace illness cost society £8.2 billion.

Physiotherapists can help employers keep their staff healthy and performing well at work by:

- Preventing people from taking time off sick in the first place

- Getting people back to work on full normal duties
- Facilitating a managed return to work if alternative or modified duties are required
- Delivering a cost-effective service for employers.

PricewaterhouseCoopers reported that one employer experienced a return of £34 for every £1 they invested, through reduced absence rates and improved staff retention by providing in-house and discounted physiotherapy for their staff.

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy recommends all employers take these easy steps to improve workplace health and wellbeing:

- Ensure staff take regular breaks and try to be active at lunchtime
- Display leaflets and posters about healthy eating and the benefits of regular exercise
- Encourage staff to report any problems early and in confidence
- Make use of low cost and free advice services such as the Health for Work advice line www.health4work.nhs.uk or call 0800 077 88 44

Case study

In tough economic times, businesses and organisations of all sizes need to be resilient to survive and prosper.

Many employers have successfully tackled the problem of sickness absence by investing in physiotherapy and other early intervention services. An excellent example of this approach is Staffordshire County Council, which has so far seen productivity return equivalent to over a quarter of a million pounds since introducing its own sickness absence scheme.

CTC Physiotherapy worked with Staffordshire County Council on a

rapid access physiotherapy project, along with other wellbeing measures.

The local authority has reported an eight percent drop in staff absence, amounting to 9,000 fewer sick days a year, a 12 percent reduction in musculoskeletal absences, and a 300 percent return on investment since the new system was introduced.

A dedicated physiotherapy service is now in place for staff with conditions such as pain and stiffness in joints, muscles, nerves and soft tissues. It offers rapid treatment to help staff return to work quickly.