

The Black Report - What is it?

What: The first ever review of the Health of Britain's Working Age Population ‐ "Working for a Healthier Tomorrow"

Who: Written by Dame Carol Black ‐ A Consultant in Rheumatology by background

Why: Commissioned by the Secretary of State for Health and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions: Purpose:

- To measure the economic costs of ill health and its impact on work. To consider the health of people or working age in Britain and the consequences of this for society, families, children, workplaces and communities

- To identify key challenges & factors that prevent good health

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Identify recommendations for ways in which the health of working age people can be improved

Summary of the Report

As with many of these types of reports, shocking figures jar us into reality and make us sit up and listen. It starts to debunk the myths of society that lead us to believe that nothing can be done about the problems of ill health and worklessness..

This is no different, so from the Introduction to the Report - "175 million working days were lost to illness in 2006". The economic cost is huge - estimated £100 billion (more than the NHS annual budget) - and some of this is out of the pocket of your business.

The cost of actually dealing with the health conditions (benefits, healthcare) that most often cause the sickness absence is reckoned to be over £60 billion. This is not due to major illness or even common diseases - but common mental health issues like anxiety and musculoskeletal disorders like back pain.

But let us not forget the human - the more important costs. The real reason to help people stay in work is to prevent social exclusion, poor self esteem, low income and poverty, and further illness and depression. Being out of work affects families, homes, schools, businesses and communities and this is something we all need to take account of.

Long term unemployment is bad for our health, the right kind of work is good for us. Most of us can work safely with some degree of "illness" or "injury" and make a valid contribution to the society in which we live.

Challenges

Recommendations

- Economic costs = £100 billion a year - greater than NHS annual budget

A new approach to health and work must be adopted by all parties

- The evidence base for the business case for investing in the health of employees is not understood by employers

Measure and report on the benefits of employers investing in health and well being of employees. This should be used to feedback to board level.

- Lack of suitable information and advice presents a barrier to employers investing in health

A business led health and well being consultancy service should be developed

- Society does not recognise the importance of the link between health and personal, family and society inclusion

Promote understanding of the positive relationship between health and work among employers, healthcare professionals and the public

- GPs feel ill-equipped to offer advice on return to work - as a result their advice is understandably cautious

GPs and other Healthcare professionals should be advised so they can help people enter, stay in or return to work

- Sick certification focuses on what people cannot do rather than on what they can

Electronic "fit" note proposed, focused on what people can do. Improving communication between employers, employees and GPs

- Insufficient access to support for individuals in the early stages of sickness. The vast majority of SMEs are unsupported

"Fit for Work" service for support in the early stages of sickness, aiming to make work related health support available to all.

- The number of people on incapacity benefit represents a failure of healthcare and employment support. Current strategies have had limited success, especially in identifying health conditions earlier.

Expand the "Fit for Work" service to those on incapacity benefits and other out-of-work benefits. Integrate health support with employment and skills programmes.

- Occupational Health services are detached from mainstream healthcare. This undermines holistic care.

Inclusion of occupational health, vocational rehabilitation with mainstream healthcare. A universal awareness and understanding of the latest evidence and most effective interventions.

- Existing government department structure prevents the government from fully "playing its part in meeting the challenges of the review".

Strengthen governmental structure to improve cross working of the departments whose policies influence the health of Britain's working age population.