Cancer and Chronic or Serious Illness Policy

In line with our mission and values, [organisation] is committed to supporting our employees who may be living with or after cancer or any other chronic or serious illness. This policy sets out how we will support our employees, and what employees can expect, when diagnosed with cancer or other chronic or serious illness, through periods of absence from work, returning to work after absence, and in balancing work and health needs on an ongoing basis.

Principles

[Organisation] has established the following principles, which inform how we developed, and how we will operate, this policy:

* Listening to the member of staff, their needs and their experience
* Communicating regularly and openly
* Giving clarity on what to expect where possible
* Being flexible and creative in how we respond and accommodate employees
* Considering new or different options if they work for all involved

We are committed to supporting colleagues with cancer or other chronic and serious illness. That support extends where a colleague:

* wants to continue working during treatment or illness;
* is absent from work due to treatment or illness;
* is returning to work after a period of absence;
* is managing, on an ongoing basis, the chronic effects of cancer or other illness.

We recognise that the course of cancer or a chronic or serious illness is not always linear or predictable. This policy sets out approaches, which can be taken at different times during that experience, but it is not possible to cover every scenario. The principles of the policy will apply however, and we will discuss your needs and consider and develop options to meet them.

We also recognise that the approaches set out may not be suitable in every case; there may be alternative approaches, which would be preferable to you, such as a more informal approach for example. Your style and wishes will be accommodated, in line with the principles above. Please feel free to contact HR or your manager to discuss your needs.

This policy is informed by research conducted by the ESRI for the Irish Cancer Society. It recognises and supports the employer’s obligations under the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015.

# Diagnosis with cancer or a chronic or serious illness

## Initial supports

A diagnosis of cancer or other chronic or serious illness can be an extremely difficult time. In the first instance, please be aware that the following supports are in place.

[Insert details of Employee Assistance Programme, if available]

The time of diagnosis can be difficult, and you may need or want to take time yourself to speak with your family and friends, consult your medical team, or take time yourself to work through the news. If you require time off from work to help with this, this may be taken as sick leave, in line with our Sick Leave Policy. You do not need to disclose the precise reason for your absence immediately, if you do not want to.

If you have been diagnosed with cancer, Irish Cancer Society services are available to you including nurse-led advice on the Support Line and referral to counselling services. You may avail of these by contacting the Irish Cancer Support Line at 1800 200 700.

## Sharing your diagnosis

When you are ready to do so, speak with your manager or a member of HR about your diagnosis. They will listen to you and may ask questions to better understand your situation. You only need to share information you are comfortable with.

Letting colleagues know can be difficult. You may want to share news personally, you may wish for HR/your manager to share, or you may not be ready for others to know at this time. Your manager or a member of HR may discuss this with you at your first conversation. At all times, you have full control of whether any information is shared and, if so, how much and what information is shared.

No decisions in relation to working arrangements need to be made in that initial conversation. Instead, your manager or a member of HR will arrange to meet with you again to discuss and develop your individual plan in relation to work.

You may already be managing a chronic or serious condition that you have not yet disclosed. If and when you are ready to disclose this, you should contact your manager or a member of HR and the same principles will apply.

# Developing your Cancer Support Plan

Every person’s needs and every situation will be different. When you are ready, a meeting with you, your manager and a member of HR will be held to develop your individual plan. This plan can be developed if you are taking time off from work for your illness or treatment, if you wish to remain in work during treatment, or as a plan for your ongoing working with a chronic condition.

The aim is to provide information, certainty (insofar as possible), and reassurance. If you would like to, you may wish to bring someone (a colleague, friend, or family member) to join the conversation.

At this meeting, we will walk through this policy and other relevant policies, and answer any questions you may have. We will also discuss and develop your Cancer Support Plan. There is a checklist at Appendix 1, which sets out the areas, which will be discussed. These include:

* Any adjusted working or time-off arrangements. More information on the type of arrangements available are included below.
* The expected duration of arrangements/time-off. This is just an estimate, as it is important to remember that illness does not always behave predictably and so flexibility and understanding may be required as circumstances around treatment and issues can change.
* Pay and benefits. This includes sick pay entitlements while taking time off from work (these are outlined in full in your workplace Sick Leave Policy); any pay related implications of adjusted working arrangements; annual leave implications, if any; social welfare entitlements; pension or permanent health insurance matters.
* Agreement of how and in what form medical certificates need to be submitted.
* How you would like to be communicated with over any periods of absence.
* Communication with team members and other colleagues, and what information, if any, you would like shared with them.

After the meeting, you will be given a copy of the plan for your own reference. The plan is flexible and can be adapted or updated at any time by discussing with your manager and/or HR.

# Returning to work after a period of extended absence

Returning to work after a period of extended absence, for any reason, can come with mixed emotions.

When you are preparing to return to work, you should contact your manager or HR to have an initial discussion. After this discussion, an occupational health referral may be made for you, with the [organisation]’s nominated doctor. This will allow us to receive further information, if needed, on how we can best facilitate your return to work and on any adjustments required. You will also be invited to provide any guidance from your own doctor.

When you are ready, a meeting with you, your manager and a member of HR will be held to develop your individual plan for returning to work. This plan is flexible and may change, but is helpful to set out at this stage. If you would like to, you may wish to bring someone (a colleague, friend, or family member) to join the conversation.

At this meeting, the following areas will be discussed:

* What working arrangements will look like for you on your return to work. This may include adjusted working arrangements or a phased return to work.
* The estimated length of adjusted working arrangements or phased return which can be reviewed and adjusted as needed.
* Time-off for medical or non-medical appointments (e.g. counselling, support groups).
* Communication with your employee and HR. Designated catch-up times should be scheduled between the employee, manager and HR to discuss how the return to the workplace is going, and whether any additional supports or adjustments need to be made.
* Communication with colleagues, including what communication to share about the your return to work. To avoid an influx of overwhelming calls, an idea would be for you to draft an email, notifying colleagues of your return date, with a note to say you will be in touch in due course.

Any concerns, worries or questions you have about returning to work, and any additional supports that can be put in place. This should include any longer-term affects you may be experiencing, emotional, physically or otherwise.

# Recurrence or changes in your condition

Cancer and other chronic and serious illnesses don’t always follow a linear path. Please bear in mind that cancer and/or its treatments can have long-term effects on you, physically and emotionally. Unfortunately, there may be a time where your condition worsens or changes, and the arrangements in place no longer meet your needs. If this happens, you should contact HR or your manager when you are ready to do so. They will listen supportively, and work with you to put a new plan in place, which better meets your needs.

# Flexible working options and adjustments

If you wish to continue working following a diagnosis of cancer or other chronic or serious illness or through a period of treatment and you have been medically certified to do so, we will work with you, as far as is reasonably practicable, to make adjustments to ensure your working environment and working hours are suitable. Similarly, adjustments may be required following your return to work after an extended absence.

Adjustments may include:

* Temporarily reduced working hours: weekly working hours could be reduced on a temporary basis.
* Flexible hours or changes in working times: A temporary change to start times may be granted, a “split-shift” may be given, or changes may be made to days of work.
* Remote working: every effort will be made to accommodate staff members who normally work from a physical premises to undertake temporary remote working, if suitable.
* More frequent breaks.
* A temporary reduction in workload.
* A temporary or permanent change in role/responsibilities.
* Modification of work equipment or addition of new equipment.

This will be dependent on each individual’s needs, as well as what is feasible within individual roles. You may have other proposals or ideas, and should feel free to suggest these to your manager or HR. All ideas and suggestions will be considered. While we will make every effort to make suitable adjustments, it may not be possible to accommodate every option proposed. If a proposal cannot be accommodated, you will be given an explanation why and alternative options will be suggested.

These adjustments will be discussed and agreed with you as part of your Cancer Support plan. Your manager will monitor these with you over time and alterations will be made where appropriate.

Some options will have an impact on your pay and/or annual leave entitlement or other contractual terms. The specific implications will be discussed with you in your individual planning meeting.

# Time-off for appointments

You may require time-off work for medical appointments related to your cancer or chronic or serious illness. You should let your manager know of the times of these appointments, in advance where possible. [Insert details of policy and approach for time-off for medical appointments]. This will be discussed and agreed when developing your Cancer Support plan.

For appointments of longer duration or where more time is required, sick leave may be taken, this will be paid under the terms of the Sick Leave Policy. If sick pay has been exhausted, unpaid leave may be used. The minimum timeframe that will qualify for classification as sick leave or unpaid leave is a half day.

It is also recognised that non-medical care can be as important for the management of a serious or chronic illness as medical care. If you require time-off for non-medical appointments such as counselling or support groups for example, you should discuss these with your manager or as part of your individual plan. [Insert details of policy and approach for time-off for non-medical appointments]

# Buddy system

We have established a “Buddy system” for colleagues returning to work after a period of leave. This includes leave such as maternity or carer’s leave, as well as period of absence due to illness.

The buddy system is optional but will be offered to you. If you wish to avail of it, you will be assigned a buddy who is a colleague in the organisation, whose role is to provide a friendly peer support for your return to work. They can help to introduce you to new colleagues, catch you up on any organisational changes, answer questions you may have, and provide a listening ear about your return. Buddies are trained in our policies and procedures, and in their role.

# Implementation and review

We will provide training and guidance to managers on how to implement this policy and support people with cancer or other chronic or serious illness.

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it remains reflective of best practice and is continuing to meet the needs of staff and the organisation.

If you have any feedback or commentary on this policy, please contact [Contact point]. Your feedback will be considered as part of the review process.

# Appendix 1

**Cancer Support Plan Meeting Checklist**

This checklist should be completed by the manager, in conjunction with the employee, at the individual planning meeting, and a copy should be kept by both parties and sent to [HR contact point]

Employee Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Manager Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Yes** | **No** | **Action/Comment** |
| **Working arrangements** | | | |
| Are adjustments in working arrangements required?  If yes, describe the adjustments agreed in comment box |  |  |  |
| Is there an expected timeframe for these arrangements to remain in place? *(estimate)*  If yes, outline in comment box |  |  |  |
| Is there time-off required?  If yes, outline the expected timeframe in comment box *(estimate)* |  |  |  |
| **Pay and entitlements (the following should be explained and discussed)** | | | |
| Sick pay entitlement |  |  |  |
| Permanent Health Insurance (PHI) |  |  |  |
| Social welfare entitlements  *See gov.ie for further information* |  |  |  |
| Impact on entitlements  (e.g. Impact on annual leave) |  |  |  |
| Pension implications |  |  |  |
| Time off for medical appointments |  |  |  |
| Time off for non-medical appointments |  |  |  |
| **Communication plan** | | | |
| Medical and social welfare certs |  |  |  |
| Communication plan between employee and manager during period(s) of absence  Outline agreed plan in comment box |  |  |  |
| Communication with colleagues  Outline agreed plan in comment box |  |  |  |
| **Supports (employee to be made aware of the following supports)** | | | |
| Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) |  |  |  |
| Irish Cancer Society services |  |  |  |

This plan can be updated at any time after discussion with your manager and/or HR. Any adjustments will result in temporary adjustments to your contract and may have pay implications, this will be discussed with you.

Signed: ­­­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Manager

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Employee

# Appendix 2

**Returning to Work Meeting Checklist**

**Individual Planning Meeting – Return to Work Checklist**

This checklist should be completed by the manager, in conjunction with the employee, at the individual planning meeting, and a copy should be kept by both parties and sent to to [HR contact point]

Employee Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Manager Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Yes** | **No** | **Action/Comment** |
| **Return to work arrangements** | | | |
| Has a return to work date been agreed? |  |  |  |
| Is there a requirement for a phased return?  If yes, outline details in comment box |  |  |  |
| **Working arrangements** | | | |
| Are adjustments to working arrangements required?  If yes, describe the adjustments agreed in comment box |  |  |  |
| Is there an expected timeframe for these arrangements to remain in place? *(estimate)*  If yes, outline in comment box |  |  |  |
| **Pay and entitlements (the following should be explained and discussed)** | | | |
| Sick pay entitlement |  |  |  |
| Permanent Health Insurance (PHI) |  |  |  |
| Social welfare entitlements  *See gov.ie for further information* |  |  |  |
| Impact on entitlements (e.g. impact on annual leave) |  |  |  |
| Pension implications |  |  |  |
| Time off for medical appointments |  |  |  |
| Time off for non-medical appointments |  |  |  |
| **Communication plan** | | | |
| Communication plan between employee and manager – regular check-ins  Outline agreed plan in comment box |  |  |  |
| Communication with colleagues  Outline agreed plan in comment box |  |  |  |
| Has buddy been identified?  Introduction with buddy to be arranged |  |  |  |
| **Supports (employee to be made aware of the following supports)** | | | |
| Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) |  |  |  |
| Irish Cancer Society services |  |  |  |

This plan can be updated at any time after discussion with your manager and/or HR. Any adjustments will result in temporary adjustments to your contract and may have pay implications, this will be discussed with you.

Signed: ­­­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Manager

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Employee