



Work Related Sickness

A hidden cost

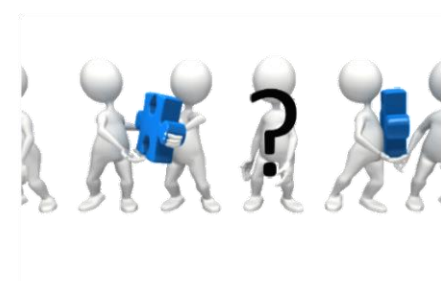
HCB IRELAND NEWSLETTER

Ireland loses 790,000 working days a year

by Eoin Byrne

Work Related sickness translates into the loss of 790,000 days of work

The Irish Times stated on 5th September 2015, that the Irish Healthcare system is broken. By mid 2015 more than 85,000 people had been on the outpatient waiting list for more than a year.



Critical reports on maternity services, nursing homes, care homes for the disabled, the number of patients left on trolleys, substandard care and a merry-go-round of at the upper echelons of management mean that dispirited staff are moving to countries where the pay, as well as the working conditions are better.

Let's be fair though, the demand for healthcare across the developed world is forever increasing and the costs of providing healthcare are so great that no country is capable of meeting that demand from taxation revenue.

Figures just published by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), show that in 2013 an estimated 55,000 workers in Ireland had a work-related illness, resulting in the loss of 790,000 days of work.

- ▲ 18% of all work-related illness are due to Stress, Anxiety and Depression (SAD). Average duration 17 days
- ▲ Musculoskeletal disorders (MSD) account for 50% of all work-related illness. Average duration 15.9 days
- ▲ All other illnesses average duration 12.8 days.

Can we draw a correlation between long waiting periods waiting for a diagnosis and long periods of absence?

SAD

Firstly, let's analyse SAD. which should be broken down as soon as possible between: **Stress** - an inability to cope with work demands which stretch beyond knowledge and ability

Anxiety / Depression - distinct psychiatric disorders with defined diagnostic criteria.

An employee and employer need that diagnosis as soon as possible to allow the 'stress' part of the absence to be dealt with at worksite level. Training, education, colleague support, just a recognition of the necessity to change certain aspects of the workplace can all alleviate stress. Anxiety and Depression, once diagnosed, need a different approach such as the utilisation of talking therapies such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or Psychotherapy, in other words a clinical rather than an organisational approach.

MSD

The inability to get an early diagnosis of a musculoskeletal disorder will have an even greater influence on absence. Delayed diagnosis has an exponential rather than an accrued impact on musculoskeletal conditions which need to be treated in the earliest possible time frame. But no one will start a treatment plan without a diagnosis, the easiest recommendation is 'rest'.



The financial burden of absence

Earnings and absence in Ireland (based on Q1 2016 figures from Central Statistics Office) and Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) reports

Average weekly earnings:

€713.41 (public & private sectors)

€901.69 (public)

€659.15 (private)

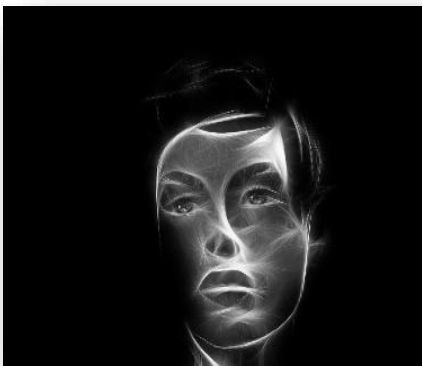
Total # employees: 1.61m

Absence figures (ESRI report)

Total # days lost: 790,000

Total # absent employees: 55,000

In their annual absenteeism report the Small Firms Association stated that "Sick days cost €490 million" in 2014.



Mental illness, including stress and anxiety, is the most common and costly cause of sickness absence, amounting to £1.17bn, a quarter of the total cost of long-term sickness absence. If not addressed quickly, mental health conditions can dramatically worsen and cause long periods of absence from work per a recent workplace study in the UK



But of course, this isn't a full picture as the actual cost, in morale, lost production and potentially additional work-related absences is virtually unmeasurable. It has even been suggested that the true figure is approaching €1bn.

What can we do?

by Karen Gamble – HCB EB Specialist

We must accept that joined up thinking within the Health Systems just isn't on the cards. The working population isn't going to be fast tracked over the non-working population for diagnostic tests or consultations. The best an employer can do is to engage with health professionals who specialise in getting employees back to work and keeping those employees in the workplace.

Our **Nurse Case Managers (NCM)** are trained to understand the barriers to return to work; social, domestic, work place, financial, accessing the health system and then to overcome these barriers or at least to work within the constraints imposed by these barriers.

- ▲ Professional NCM's know how to calculate the cost benefit of funding treatment privately versus the costs of prolonged absence.
- ▲ Professional NCM's know how to spot trends.
- ▲ Professional NCM's can soon spot the employee who doesn't want to go back to work.

We can't mend broken state run systems, we can't mend broken employees, but we can help you to navigate the challenges of dealing with work related illness.

References:

1. Irish Times – [Ireland's ailing health service](#)
2. Irish Times – [The facts behind illness in the workplace](#)
3. Central Office of Statistics – [Employment hours and earnings](#)
4. The Journal – [Sick days cost €490 million](#)

FOR MORE INFORMATION,

Whatever your workplace health & rehabilitation requirements, HCB Ireland can help and advise you on the best course of action.

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