

Tackling absenteeism in the workplace

The cost of work absenteeism to the UK economy is in the region of £10-12 billion annually with the average direct cost of absence each year around £434 per employee.

The costs arise through numerous factors including:

- Additional staff or overtime to make up for lost production
- Inability to provide services
- Reduction in the range or standard of service
- Low morale resulting in low productivity
- Increased demands on the company sick pay scheme
- Increased supervisory time dealing with absence

The scale of the cost of absences is such that even small improvements in health and safety performance may offer greater opportunities for cost control than many of the business areas commonly reviewed for the purpose by management.



A HR department can determine the amount of time 'lost' through sickness absence for a specified period by using the following equation:

$$\text{Total absence (hrs/days) / possible total (hrs/days) x 100.}$$

According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) survey 'Employee Absence: a Survey of Management Policy and Practice' 84% of employers consider that it is possible to reduce their current level of sickness absence. Some absence will be outside of management's control; however, positive preventative measures can go a long way to reducing absence levels.

In recent years a growing number of employers and trade unions have become interested in the provision of additional facilities and the development of education programmes and health policies aimed at improving the general health of employees. Such measures can improve industrial relations, increase productivity, lower absence & accident rates and improve the organisation's public image.

Offering employees free health scans is becoming one of the most popular methods adopted by many UK Human Resources and Occupational Health departments to help reduce long term work absence.

The benefits of health screening

Health screening offers benefits to both employees and companies:

Employees

Health screening detects serious health conditions, such as cancer and heart disease, even at an early stage. This means employees can receive effective help immediately – whether it is just changing their lifestyle or taking medication. In general, many employees who undergo a scan have no abnormalities at all which gives them tremendous peace of mind.

Companies

Health screening can help organisations to prepare for and perhaps avoid numerous problems. It can significantly reduce long-term work absences, due to illness, by alerting employees to health problems before they become serious. Diminished long-term sickness reduces the need for additional staff, reduces demands on a company's sick pay scheme and reduces the impact on overall company performance.

Health screening can also protect employers from the threat of health related litigation cases. By using scanning to establish the health of an employee before he or she begins to work for an organisation, employers can prove that any existing conditions are not a result of company negligence. Annual health checks during employment can alert employees to potential health problems before they become serious and allow occupational health departments to identify and eliminate potential health threats to other employees. Scanning can also prove that employees have a clean bill of health when they leave an organisation, again, reducing the threat of future litigation against the company.

What kind of health screenings are available?

Private health insurance, such as BUPA, can offer the provision of a basic health check; however, these do



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not always pick up the more serious conditions, such as heart and artery disease and bowel and lung cancer.

Companies who are seriously committed to long-term staff welfare should look beyond the basics and consider more extensive health screenings like those offered at the European Scanning Centre.

The European Scanning Centre, which is based in Harley Street London, uses the latest disease prevention technology to detect the earliest signs of disease, often years before any symptoms.

Health screening in practice

Rozelle Consulting, a leading media agency in South London, has been providing its senior staff members with health screening for the past year and a half. David Clarke, human resources director of Rozelle, believes that health screening has brought numerous benefits to the organisation. David comments, "Rozelle Consulting has always believed that people are its most important asset. Health screening allows our staff to help identify possible early signs of heart and lung disease, cancer or osteoporosis and then, if necessary take measures such as changing their diet, lifestyle, or



seeking appropriate medication or treatment – which is so often more successful if treating a disease in its very early stages. For staff who are free of symptoms, but may have risk factors, such as a family history of certain diseases, they repeatedly tell me that the health screening we provide gives them peace of mind."

One of Rozelle Consulting's senior directors, Angela Stirling, had a routine health check in October 2005. The results of her heart scan left her deeply shocked – she had a high calcium score and was referred to a heart specialist as a matter of urgency. Angela explains, "The scan

probably saved my life. My doctor put me on statins immediately and told me in no uncertain terms to change my diet and stop smoking or if I didn't have a heart attack first, I would be in hospital for a bypass and out of action for weeks or months! Health screening is a wonderful tool and I passionately believe that more companies should be offering it to their employees." She added, "I now have an amazing virtual 3D colour picture on my computer of my heart with its clogged arteries, a permanent reminder to keep up my now much healthier lifestyle!"

David Clarke comments, "Angela is one of our most dynamic and valuable members of staff and is currently overseeing a major project. If she had become sick, or worse, it would have had devastating repercussions, both from a personal and business perspective. Fortunately, Rozelle Consulting recognises that prevention is better than cure and we sincerely believe that health screening is an effective tool in tackling long term work absenteeism."

For further information about health screening call 020 7436 5755 or visit: www.europeanscanning.com



U.K. Methods-Time Measurement Association (2000) Ltd.

Chairman: R.W. Pearce (0114) 2481793

Secretary: D. Findon (0151) 4233175

Technical/Examinations/Membership: P.D. Horton (0182) 761424

Publicity: D.W. Cole (0115) 9431287

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