



GETTING CANCER PATIENTS BACK TO WORK

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As Movember comes to a close, many men will be shaving their mustaches tomorrow, but the positive effects of this campaign are likely to last. Movember is a campaign in which men grow mustaches to promote awareness and raise funds to fight prostate and testicular cancer during November.

While people are more likely to undergo cancer screenings during awareness months, such as Movember and October's Breast Cancer Month, returning to work can also help with the healing process, says Michael Klachefsky, national practice leader of The Standard, a provider of financial products and services.

Once employees with cancer are back with their organizations, it symbolizes recovery, Klachefsky says. Cancer is a scary diagnosis, but when those employees can return to the work force, it serves as a morale booster for themselves and their families and provides a sense of normalcy. This can help those employees recovery even faster than if they stayed at home.

"It prevents people with cancer from going into a disability mentality where they shut themselves off from the world, and that's not good for anyone," Klachefsky says.

As an employee with cancer returns to work, the employer should ensure that the environment is suitable to deal with any lingering conditions, Klachefsky says. An employer can do so by partnering with a carrier that helps create an ergonomic work environment, which helps that employee feel more comfortable and be more productive.

For instance, some women with breast cancer develop lymphedema, making it difficult to move their arms, Klachefsky says. A woman who has physical demands in the workplace might need an assisted-lifting device while a sedentary woman can experience discomfort from the position of the mouse at her computer, calling for an ergonomic desk. These simple ergonomic solutions go a long way in helping these employees effectively return to the workplace.

When employees with cancer return to work, employers should also be flexible regarding their work accommodations, Klachefsky says. Sometimes employees with cancer have adverse reactions to chemotherapy, preventing them from fully committing to a set schedule. Because these side effects are unpredictable and can vary, supervisors should avoid giving those employees long-term projects with strict deadlines. Those employees should also have the option to work from home. After undergoing chemotherapy, the immune system is weakened, and public settings can be unsafe for those employees.

“The problem we face sometimes is supervisors want everyone to be 100 percent fit all the time and won’t accept them back unless they are 100 percent fit,” Klachefsky says. “That is erroneous thinking, and employees should come back early.”