OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AUDIT

Return to work interview forms

Background Information
The sickness absence policy requires line managers to conduct a return to work interview and complete a form to confirm this has taken place. The sickness absence policy requires this form to be sent to the occupational health nursing adviser who will maintain it for monitoring purposes.

This audit aims to comply with the monitoring requirements of the sickness absence policy by the examination of all return to work documents completed for the month of October 2007.

Method
Payroll data for the month of October 2007 has been analysed to identify the numbers of people who returned from sick leave between October 1st and October 31st 2007.

To allow time for any delays in the completion or return of documentation to occupational health, a total of 3 working weeks have been allowed to pass since the end of October before this monitoring exercise was undertaken.

Key Findings
On November 19th 2007 a total of 75 return to work forms had been received by the occupational health nursing adviser, accounting for 63% of the 119 separate individuals who were detailed on payroll data that should have received a return to work interview.

An analysis of the 75 return to work forms show the reason for ill health, the department where the person works and the start and end date of the illness episode.

Of the 75 returned forms, employees made no comment about their health in relation to work on 60 of those forms (80%). Of those that did make comment, the return to work interview process recorded details of the history of the person’s illness, their current treatment, planned treatment and whether any factors at work aggravated their health problem.

Of the 75 returned forms managers made no comment on 55 of the return to work forms (73%). Of those that did make comment, very little evidence existed to demonstrate the return to work interview was supporting health at work. The exception was with one manager who advised the person to take further sick leave as they were not well enough to have returned to work. Other forms simply said a full recovery had been made or that occupational health advice had been followed.

Conclusion
The sickness absence policy requiring the completion and return of return to work forms is largely being ignored. When forms are returned, the vast majority just duplicate information already detailed on self certificates or medical certificates. There is little evidence from the return to work documentation that return to work interviews support the return to work process, nor does the process reflect any discussion about a person’s previous history of health and attendance at work.

Recommendation
Return to work interviews should support health and attendance at work. The interview process needs to include consideration of the person’s history of previous sickness absence and prompt the interviewer to seek advice from HR about the pay implications of repeated absence, or seek an occupational health assessment or consult with HR about the appropriateness of disciplinary action.

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