

Hello everyone

Welcome to our Spring 2019 edition of the Working With Cancer® newsletter.



In this edition, we include:

- A **blog by Liz O'Riordan, our new Ambassador** about "Changing the conversation around work and cancer."
- Findings from **two pieces of research** – by Macmillan and by our associate Andrew Parsons – both of which highlight the important role played by employers in supporting an employee to successfully manage work and cancer.
- A link to **two language guides- for health professionals and non-health professionals** - published by Novartis as part of the 'Transforming Breast Cancer Together' European initiative with which we are involved.
- Details of an **Ecancer survey** into the information needs of people affected by cancer. Please take part if you can.
- A profile of **WWC associate Louise Barrett**
- Some more news about our **next Open Workshop** for employers on 8th October in London.

News – WWC's new Ambassador Liz O'Riordan

Last month we were delighted to announce that Liz O'Riordan had accepted our invitation to be an Ambassador for WWC.

About Liz O'Riordan

Liz was a 40-year-old consultant breast surgeon when she was diagnosed with Stage 3 breast cancer in July 2015. She suddenly realised that she had no idea what it was like to be a patient, despite spending her working life treating the disease. She started an award-winning blog to help doctors and patients see what having breast cancer is really like, in a friendly, informative way (liz.oriordan.co.uk) and now speaks all over the world about her experiences, including a **TEDx talk (The Jar of Joy)**, focusing on digital healthcare, self-care, and how to improve the patient experience.



Full details about her appointment can be found [here](#)

Quarter of cancer patients receive no return-to-work support after diagnosis People Management

At the end of March People Management published an article highlighting the vital role employers play in supporting cancer survivors to return to work. Research undertaken by Macmillan revealed that employees feel pressured to go back early and cover up symptoms. Of the 1,500 workers surveyed by the charity, more than a quarter (27 per cent) received no support to help them back to work after their diagnosis, and of those who did return to work, 23 per cent did not feel well enough to be there. WWC provides 121 coaching, training and consultancy services to support employers and employees affected by cancer in order to ensure these problems don't arise. To find out more please [contact us](#). Read the article [here](#).

Important initial research findings about the psychological engagement of people returning to work after cancer

In 2018, WWC supported a research study conducted by our associate Andrew Parsons at the University of Hertfordshire. Andrew (with his Supervisor Dr Colleen Addicott), presented his initial findings at the British Psychological Society, Division of Occupational Psychology meeting in Chester on the 9th January 2019. The title of the talk was "The aftershock of coming back to work: Work engagement in Cancer Survivors." To read about their initial research findings click [here](#).

'People assumed that if I was back at work then I must be fine, but it's not that simple. I didn't understand, or want to acknowledge, how vulnerable I was, so how could my boss and colleagues understand?'

WWC Coaching Client



Autumn WWC Open Workshop For Employers – 8th October 2019

We will be holding another open workshop on **Tuesday 8th October 2019 from 10am to 1pm** at **Lockton Companies LLP, The St. Botolph Building, 138 Houndsditch, London, EC3A 7AG**. This highly practical and participative workshop covers areas such as handling communication and difficult conversations sensitively, understanding how to support employees from diagnosis through to a return to work and beyond, the legal framework and workplace adjustments, and how to develop a cancer strategy, policies and action plans. More details can be found [here](#).



Contribute to a survey about the information needs of people affected by cancer.

ecancer

Ecancer is asking cancer patients and their families/friends to tell them about their experiences of receiving and finding information during, and beyond, their treatment journey. This is with the aim of helping to guide how information can be improved, making it more relevant and personalised to the individual. If you'd be interested in taking part please click [here](#).

Changing the conversation about work and cancer

In the spotlight: Louise Barrett

When I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2015 it never occurred to me that I would do anything else other than keep working. Having originally worked in the Pharmaceutical Industry and Financial Services, for the past 18 years I had worked in leadership development and coaching.

It is a privilege supporting senior executives dealing with the everyday challenges of business and people. Working during my treatment helped me to feel I had a sense of purpose, routine and a reason to keep going. My treatment involved surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy over a period of 9 months.

The side effects were debilitating and degrading...losing my hair, watching my nails go black, coping with severe fatigue and generally feeling under the weather was very hard to deal with. However, thanks to an amazing wig, nail polish and a touch of makeup I was able to put on a brave face to the world, and surprisingly not one of my clients noticed the changes in my appearance (or were too polite to comment!). Even my brother asked half way through my chemo when I was going to lose my hair!

Working during treatment for cancer is not for everyone, but my experience is that most people of working age find keeping the relationship with their employer in some form is both necessary and gives them a sense of normality. In 2017 I met Barbara Wilson, following an introduction from one of my financial services clients.

Working With Cancer® seemed the perfect combination of my coaching work and supporting others affected by cancer to live meaningful lives. I never fail to be surprised at the strength, determination, resilience and dignity of those I meet. Cancer is not an automatic death sentence and we can still remain in control of our life (even with a terminal diagnosis).



Changing the conversation around work and cancer (Blog by Liz O’Riordan)

I spent most of my working life treating patients with cancer, but until I was diagnosed with cancer myself, I had no idea what a huge impact cancer would have on my own working life. I knew returning to work would be hard, but I didn’t realise how hard it would be. I don’t think my employers knew, either.

Because unless you or someone close to you has had cancer treatment, you cannot grasp how debilitating the side effects can be, especially those that can’t be seen. Trying to explain to your boss that you’re tired – and what fatigue means – sheer physical and mental exhaustion despite the fact that you’re eating and sleeping well – is exhausting in itself. Explaining that after chemotherapy it’s hard enough learning to concentrate again on something more important than what to watch on Netflix, let alone remember what you’ve been told to do. And then there’s the guilt you feel having to arrange colleagues to cover you when you have scans and blood tests and appointments, or using up your precious annual leave. When you look physically well enough to return to work, people don’t see the scars under your clothes or the mental and emotional changes you are dealing with. Not everyone is kind and understanding. Because you look OK, you should be back to normal, right...? It shouldn’t have to be this hard.

There’s no right time to tell a cancer patient what their rights are when it comes to returning to work, and it’s wrong to assume that

every employer will know what they are as well. You are given so many leaflets when you are diagnosed, many will get left in a pile and never read. What I would love is for every cancer patient to be told what their legal rights are regarding work as soon as they are diagnosed. Tell them that they might not want to look at it then, but they will need it in the future. And with that, include a leaflet to send to their employers with their sick note that reminds them that they have a legal obligation to help that person return to work as well.

When one in two people will get cancer in their lifetime, the rights of cancer patients need to be common knowledge. It has to become normal to talk about it.

Language guides to support those with Advanced and Metastatic Breast Cancer

What would you say to a friend or patient with advanced or metastatic breast cancer? Do you know what that is and what it means for the person with that diagnosis?

In March this year two language guides were published by Novartis which provide practical tips and recommendations about how to talk to patients with either advanced or metastatic breast cancer and/or their relatives. The two guides represent the outcome of two rounds of consultation with the Patient Community (Breast Cancer patients – various stages) and Breast Cancer Experts (Oncologists, Nurses, Psycho-oncologists), and are meant to facilitate a difficult dialogue around a topic that’s too often a “taboo”. Read more/ or download [here](#).



And finally...

If you need a speaker for your conference or event, or you need further information, please [contact us](#). Tel: **07910 835585**