

Bringing the Pieces Together: Five key issues

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A view from three perspectives

- Developing evidence based programmes to help people with more serious mental health conditions to gain and sustain employment
- Employing people with more serious mental health conditions within mental health services
- Working with a long term mental health condition

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1. The challenges posed by mental health conditions in an employment are different and less tangible than those faced by people with many other health conditions or impairments

Mental health conditions both 'common' and 'more severe'

- tend to **fluctuate** and it can be difficult to predict when these fluctuations will occur: fluctuating problems require fluctuating support and adjustments
- typically affect a person's ability to negotiate the social, rather than the physical, world of work: require adjustments and support with the **social demands** of the work place
- Often **attract fear** because they are not immediately obvious, can emerge at any time, and are surrounded by myths of incompetence and danger that surround them

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2. Mental health and employment are intimately inter-related

- Appropriate employment actively improves mental health and protects against relapse
- A mental health condition often results in a person losing their employment

Need to challenge popular assumptions like *'People should refrain from work and receive treatment until they are fully better before they can return to work'*

- The longer you are out of work the more difficult it is to return
- Work actively improves mental health
- Appropriate support and adjustments (in parallel with treatment) can often prevent a person taking time 'off sick' and facilitate rapid return to work

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3. Fear and uncertainty on the party of both employees and employers present major barriers to employment

- Fear and uncertainty make employers reluctant to 'take the risk' of employing people with a mental health condition
 - Lack of understanding of mental health conditions and the popular myths that surround them → fear
 - Hidden and fluctuating nature of mental health conditions → uncertainty
- Fear and uncertainty make people with mental health conditions reluctant to 'take the risk' of returning to work/moving from benefits to work
 - Concerns about prejudice and discrimination at work, work worsening mental health problems, being financially worse off → fear
 - Fluctuating mental health condition → uncertainty about whether they will be able to cope/re-access welfare benefits if they are unsuccessful

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Uncertainty involves risk and both employers and employees seek to minimise risk

- One of the best ways of decreasing fear and uncertainty is experience:
 - employee's experience of working successfully with a mental health condition
 - employer's experience of successfully employing someone with a mental health condition
- Welfare to work services need to
 - actively support both parties to enter the employment relationship:
 - address ways of decreasing the risk for both parties

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4. Treatment alone is not enough – the type of employment support offered is critical

- At least 60% of people with more serious mental health conditions can successfully gain and sustain employment with the right kind of support (16 randomised control trials show superiority of 'Individual Placement and Support' over traditional vocational rehabilitation – Bond et al 2008)
- No relationship between 'clinical variables' – diagnosis, duration, symptomatology, severity etc. and outcomes ... therefore there is no justification for selection on the basis of diagnosis or severity.
- Motivation and self-efficacy appear to be the only critical individual variables ... therefore efforts to raise expectations and decrease the fear and uncertainty that make people reluctant to re-enter the workplace are critical.

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7 key principles of successful employment support 'Individual Placement with Support'

- **A focus on competitive employment** rather than intermediate sheltered alternatives or training before employment is sought - a positive 'can do' attitude and belief that the person can work
- **Everyone is eligible** – no selection on the basis of 'employability' or 'work readiness'
- **Job search is consistent with individual preferences**
- **Job search is rapid** – any preparation or training is concurrent with job search
- **Clinical treatment and employment support are integrated and occur in parallel** – employment expertise in clinical treatment teams, treatment and support plans address vocational issues
- **Support is time-unlimited and individualised for both employee and employer** - as mental health conditions fluctuate support for both must be available when needed
- **Welfare benefits counselling to support the person through the transition from welfare benefits to work** – fears surrounding financial issues are a major barrier that must be addressed

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5. Employment involves a relationship between employee and employer in which both have responsibilities, and both are entitled to support in discharging these

- It is in the interests of **employers** to create an environment that enables employees to perform to their full potential
They have the **responsibility** (within reasonable limits) to provide the adjustment and supports that a person with a mental health condition needs to work effectively.
- It is in the interests of **employees** to work.
They have a **responsibility** to manage their mental health condition at work as well as they can.

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Both may need support in exercising these responsibilities – providing this requires health and employment services to work together:

- Advice and support to help employers to help them to work out how to tailor adjustments and support to the employee's fluctuating needs
- Advice and help to employees to develop plans for managing their mental health condition at work – the development of self-management plans should form a routine part of health treatment/support plans
- Where appropriate, support to employer and employee to develop joint plans about what each will do to:
 - Help the person to keep on an even keel at work
 - Identify 'triggers' and 'early warning signs' and how to address these to help the person to get back on an even keel
 - Respond to crises that occur and help the person to return to work after a crisis

Not just jobs, but careers

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