

Breast cancer survivors return to work two weeks earlier

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A top cause of disability leave is better managed with supportive employers>



CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (Oct. 13, 2020) – Breast cancer has been a top cause of disability for over a decade, but survivors spend an average of two weeks less out of work. In 2019, the average length of a short-term disability claim for breast cancer was 64 days, compared to 78 days in 2010.

These trends are according to internal data from Unum (NYSE: UNM), a leading provider of disability insurance. **One in eight women will be diagnosed with breast cancer** over the course of their lives. A supportive employer makes a big difference in recovery, along with early detection and advances in medical treatment.

“Work often provides a sense of normalcy and support for employees with breast cancer during a time of uncertainty,” said Mandy Stogner, senior leave and disability consultant at Unum. “This is why the role of employers is so important during diagnosis, treatment, and return to work.”

Employers: 8 ways to better support employees with cancer

Aside from grappling with a diagnosis, cancer patients often face a wide range of side effects from treatment. These include a weakened immune system, fatigue and strained focus. Since employee needs may change over the course of treatment, employers should provide ongoing support.

1. **Respond fast** and offer resources.
2. **Understand physical limits** and how those impact their role.
3. **Clearly define work duties.**
4. **Create a flexible schedule** or reduced workload.
5. **Adjust workstations** so they don't have to stand or sit for too long.
6. **Build in extra breaks** so they can fight fatigue.
7. **Communicate often** to keep the employee engaged.
8. **Provide feedback** and coaching on performance.

Cancer and COVID-19

Today's pandemic creates even more challenges for people with cancer. Most cancer treatments suppress the immune system. This puts cancer patients at higher risk for serious illness caused by COVID-19.

Employers should consider providing adjustments that allow physical and social distancing, remote work or modified workspaces to mitigate transmission. This is especially important during stages of treatment that suppress the immune system.

Boost your benefits

Disability insurance can provide financial protection and work support for employees as they get treatment, recover and return to work. In 2019, Unum paid \$3.7 billion in disability benefits and helped 275,000 people return to work after disability leave.