

## **Information Resource Sheet No.8**

# **MODEL HUMAN RESOURCE GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING AN EMPLOYED CARER OF A PERSON WITH A LIFE-THREATENING ILLNESS**

### **Introduction to guidelines**

#### **New challenges for employers/managers**

When a staff member is the carer for a person diagnosed with a life-threatening illness, there are various aspects of their carer role and responsibilities and the responses by other staff or clients to the carer's role and responsibilities that may require management.

Carers of a person with a life-threatening illness who wish to remain in their paid employment face many additional demands on their time, energy and commitments from their loved one's illness and treatment. In fulfilling their carer's role and responsibilities, there are many reasons why carers in paid work may wish to continue their employment. Being able to work is important in:

- Maintaining an important part of their identity.
- Keeping a sense of order and control in an uncertain environment.
- Earning income to pay for their loved one's treatment.
- Providing for their family.

The challenge for employers and those responsible for managing staff is to be aware when an employee's work may be affected by the changing circumstances of the person for whom they are caring. These changes occur beyond the workplace, but may create issues for the employed carer that require management in the carer's working life, and/or for other staff and the organisation's business.

#### **The need for human resource guidelines**

These guidelines are to help employers identify the range of human resource issues arising for an employed carer of a person with a life-threatening illness. The guidelines recognise the sensitive nature of this task due to the many ambiguous and uncertain situations caused by the unfolding of an illness and its impact on the employed carer. The employed carer's response may then also impact on managers, employees and the organisation's business.

#### **The purpose of these guidelines**

The guidelines aim to provide direction for human resource managers to respond to the needs of the employed carer, all employees and the production needs of the business by:

- Understanding the experience of each party in the workplace.
- Accepting the increased need for attention to economic, information, emotional and appraisal support needs at work brought about by the circumstances of the employed carer.

- Develop procedures in consultation with supervisors/managers, the employed carer, and employees to meet identified economic, information, emotional and appraisal support needs of each party in the workplace.
- Develop procedures to identify and resolve competing needs.

### **What is a carer of a person with a life-threatening illness?**

A carer has a primary responsibility for an ill family member or close friend. The person being cared for has a life-threatening illness, which is a medical diagnosis for diseases that may cause death. This does not mean that death is imminent, or inevitable. However, the illness may have a physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual impact on the carer as well as the ill person, and on the carer's managers and colleagues at work.

These impacts may cause diverse support needs for each party in the workplace, including:

- Economic – the costs and benefits.
- Information – who needs to know what, and how.
- Emotional – managing the tough feelings
- Appraisal – what does it all mean?

### **Management planning to support an employed carer of person with a life-threatening illness**

#### A coordinated approach

Managing the human resource issues arising for the employed carer of a person with a life-threatening illness needs to coordinate an overall approach to production, occupational health and safety, health promoting, and human resource management issues.

#### Inclusive planning

Both work systems and people may be affected in some way by the situation of a carer of a person with a life-threatening illness. Planning should be as inclusive as practicable.

#### Identify the needs

Identify the needs of the organisation, the employed carer and your staff. (See 'Manager's assessment checklist for managing a workplace employing the carer of a person with a life-threatening illness'.)

#### Identify constraints and opportunities

Identify your current constraints and opportunities.

- Do you have a budget for contracting staff, training, provision of information, access to support/counselling services, providing activities to build peer support?
- Will managing the carer's needs impinge on existing production, occupational health and safety, health promoting and human resource policies? How?

- Identify existing opportunities and limitations within your organisation's existing production demands for dealing with the needs of an employed carer.
- Identify existing strengths and weaknesses amongst your organisation's existing programs and staff for dealing with the needs of an employed carer.
- Are there resources you can access which may help you? (See 'Palliative care consultants resource list').

#### Develop and adopt a policy

Develop a workable human resources policy for your organisation on managing the needs of carers. (See 'Model Company Policy')

#### Develop and adopt a management plan

Develop a plan for the effective management of the needs of an employed carer for your organisation, based on your needs and resources, inclusive consultation with your workforce, and clear advice on when and how the plan will be used. Your plan needs to ensure you:

- Understand the competing needs of production, occupational health and safety, health promotion, and human resource issues, and how they may be met at different times in either/both the production cycle and the changing circumstances of the carer.
- Provide a supportive work environment, including peer support, debriefing meetings, access to counselling, and mentor support on an ongoing basis for managers dealing with the employed carer.
- Provide appropriate training and information that allows staff to explore issues arising from the needs of an employed carer, and learn skills for dealing with such situations.
- Plan for the grief support of an employed carer if their loved one dies, including identifying the wishes of the staff person, and staff.
- Consider the needs of special groups, such as the employed carer's supervisor, work group, clients.
- Consider whether there are cultural/religious issues for any people, and how to manage them. When possible, these can be identified during the assessment of risk factors.