Information Resource Sheet No.9

MANAGER'S ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST FOR MANAGING A WORKPLACE EMPLOYING THE CARER OF A PERSON WITH A LIFE-THREATENING ILLNESS.

Introduction to manager's assessment checklist

A management framework
This checklist is designed to assist a Managing Director, senior manager or Human Resource manager to assess their workplace's capacity for managing the diverse factors impacted by employing the carer of a person with a life-threatening illness.

Fostering cooperation
The checklist is intended to foster the cooperation and participation of those responsible for managing production, occupational health and safety, health promotion and human resources needs in the work organisation. It is suggested the Managing Director, senior manager or Human Resource manager include the relevant manager(s) for each area identified in an assessment meeting.

Assessing relevance, capacity, resources and conflicting needs
The points listed are provided as a guide to some of the issues a workplace may need to consider in managing the carer of a person with a life-threatening illness. In using this checklist, managers are encouraged to:
1. Assess whether the point is relevant to your situation.
2. Assess your capacity to manage the issue.
3. Assess what resources you may need in addition to your existing resources to manage the issue.
4. Identify where there may be conflicting needs, and assess the strategies and resources for resolving them.

Production issues

- Recognise the need for a facilitator to assist the employer construct a framework for managing the competing personal, social and economic needs.
- Management needs to assess the capacity of the workforce to cover the loss of production due to absences of a carer, then decide (in consultation with those affected) how these needs may be best met.
- The pressure of increased workloads from carer absences and the indirect expression of strong emotion due to the prevailing work culture may cause staff to be distracted with their work, and lose their attention to detail, reducing productivity.

Occupational health and safety issues

- Manage accumulated stress and tiredness associated with the carer's exhaustion from increased work load at home, and continuing load in their employment.
- A carer's exhaustion at work, especially during bereavement, may be exacerbated by the workplace failing to acknowledge the carer's grief. The grief is not caused by the carer's work, but the failure to accept it and respond to it at work is likely to increase the risk of the carer's sadness deepening into an occupational illness such as depression.
- When the carer feels they have to leave the workplace to cry because they believe the workplace is for work, it is likely to indicate the carer believes the workplace is not a safe place for direct expression of their emotions. These emotions may then be expressed indirectly as anger, frustration and stress.

Health promoting care issues

- Encourage awareness of how the skills and experiences developed as a carer may be transferred to the business environment.
- Establish clear boundaries that respect the limited claim of work on health promoting human values, while acknowledging that work is an important component of identity and security in times of stress and chaos.
- Workplace support for a carer can support the ill person as they draw comfort from knowing their carer is being supported at work.

Human resource management issues

Workforce planning
- Job security is an important issue for carers in supporting them to focus on the needs of the ill person.
- More flexible approaches to the provision of sick leave for use by carers.
- Development of policies for 'work-home' inter-face issues, such as emergency communication from an ill person at home to the carer at work.
- Development of policies and procedures for a carer to work from home.
- Development of policies that recognise the priority claim on a carer of the ill person's needs over work commitments.
- Use of regular staff meeting may be a valuable means of assessing how staff members are coping with increased workloads to support the carer's absences.

Performance management
- Identifying staff members' experience with providing support during illness, dying and death that may equip them to be resource people for the organisation in dealing with issues arising.
- The absence of any workplace policy or procedures for responding to carer's needs at work apart from leave policy means most of the initiative for responding to those needs becomes the responsibility of the carer,

who is already overloaded with the needs of the person they are caring for.

- Guidelines for supporting carers may need to emphasise the value of fairness in the support or concessions that are offered, and ensure open feedback from all staff who may experience resentment or work overload.

Privacy

- Staff need to be informed how the carer wishes to manage conversations at work about their situation, especially if the carer needs work to be an escape or a normalising experience for them.

Employee relations

- Carry out a risk assessment of the impact of honest and direct communication with staff, and develop appropriate management strategies to support and contain in a safe environment staff responses to the changing situation.
- Development of an information strategy for informing people in the workplace about the carer's situation and changing needs. Include information on how gossip about the carer's situation can create barriers and social isolation for the carer because they do not know what others have heard and may feel reluctant to engage with colleagues.
- The absence of Human Resource policy for carers may leave areas of uncertainty and discomfit for many work relations, contributing to the social isolation of the carer.
- It is important to identify managers and staff who can be resources for others because they have lived through experiences of illness, grief and loss and are willing and able to support the carer, as well as provide information and emotional support to other staff to strengthen their capacity to contribute to a supportive work environment.

Employee assistance

- Sometimes a carer may need access to counselling to assist them with their personal emotional, physical and spiritual support needs.
- A workplace's provision of self-referral counselling is only part of a comprehensive framework for meeting carer needs. On its own, such a service may be seen as a symbol the workplace doesn't want to deal with carer needs, and is available for those not strong enough to cope, that is, it turns the normal experience of struggling with illness and dying into a problem for which only experts can help.

Corporate planning

- A carer policy may benefit by clarifying how the policy expresses the core values of the organisation and strengthens the integrity of the organisation.

Disputes

- Use of existing workplace dispute resolution procedures to address disputes arising from impact of person's illness on work roles, work relations and work performance.

<u>Training</u>
- Focus on developing emotionally supportive work environment during the carer's responsibility for an ill-person, and after death for a grieving period of at least one year, or beyond.
- Human Resource policy needs to incorporate ongoing professional development of Human Resource staff in dealing with carer needs, and contributing to policy development.
- Policy for carers needs to recognise that at different times, work may be a means of denial ('If I work hard, everything will be alright.'), an avenue of escape from the chaos and confusion caused by their loved-one's illness, or a place to restore the carer's sense of competence and self-worth in the face of their powerlessness and hopelessness as their loved-one's illness progresses.
- Carer's anger is a normal part of their emotional response to their loved one's illness and their own sense of powerlessness. Managers can support such staff by creating a culture of acceptance based on empathy with the carer's feelings, while at the same time encouraging the carer to be involved with their work in normal ways that are empowering because they do not treat the carer as a victim.

<u>Payroll</u>
- The ability to use sick leave as carer's leave is foundational to supporting a carer.

This checklist acknowledge that the factors affecting the carer of a person with a life-threatening illness are complex and diverse. It is important to assess the impact of these factors for the carer, for each employee affected by their relationship with the carer, and for the work organisation as a whole.

Palliative Care Victoria