

Doctors Predict Surge of Workplace Health Problems

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Doctors are becoming increasingly concerned about facing a cascade of health problems during the fallout from COVID-19, with some predicting serious consequences for employers as well as employees.

Whilst many of us develop a degree of structure around remote working, or return to work with social distancing in place, many employers don't realise that the burden of managing health problems amongst their employees sits

firmly on their desks.

"As a society, we just don't have the resources to face the coming crisis in occupational health" says Dr. Wendy Snell MBBS DCH FPC DRCOG Dip OH MSc OH, an occupational health specialist practising in London.

"There are already more occupational health jobs than doctors or nurses available to fill them and demand for the specialism is rocketing, which means employers will be waiting to get advice as waiting lists grow" she said.

Dr. Snell continued that "whilst waiting lists are commonly associated with NHS care, employers across the UK are about to find the same problem if they need to get professional advice about how to manage an employee's health problem".

With laws like the Equality Act 2010 setting down that employers must make 'reasonable adjustments' to an employee's role or environment before considering if an employee can be dismissed on health grounds, demand for occupational health advice has been steadily increasing for years, long before the arrival of COVID-19.

"We've seen huge increases in enquiries in recent weeks" says Magnus Kauders, Managing Director of [Occupational Health Assessment](#) Limited, an occupational health provider based in

Wolverhampton.

“Requests for help from employers usually follow very predictable seasonal peaks, yet the last month has been ridiculous. We’ve seen a 100% increase in demand in the last two weeks alone” he said.

Other specialists across the country have also expressed concern about the long-term impact of the lockdown on employee’s health, particularly psychological and mental health. Geoff Heyes, Head of Health Policy and Influencing at the mental health charity [Mind](#), has called for proactive detection of problems among COVID-19 survivors, but is concerned NHS mental health services may be already too overstretched.

“Going into this pandemic, only one in three people who needed help for their mental health were actually getting any support. Coming out we are going to see even higher demand.”

Continuing the theme, Drinkaware CEO [Elaine Hindal](#) issues a stark warning from the Alcohol Health Alliance. “What’s worrying is that lockdown and continued isolation could result in concerning drinking patterns going unnoticed until it’s too late. Employers must use every opportunity to plan for a return to work that prioritises employee health and wellbeing.”

Employer’s groups are also becoming increasingly concerned. The Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development say “Employee health, safety and well-being during this time is paramount. Employers need to be proactive in protecting their people and minimising the risk to staff and business continuity.” The Society of Occupational Medicine has also called for swift action to provide universal access to occupational health across the UK, stressing that only half of the UK’s population have access to workplace health support.

“We’re used to employers suddenly finding they have a health issue to consider when they embark on a redundancy programme” said Mr. Kauders “although the numbers taking those steps now are pushing a wave of problems straight into occupational health to sort out” he continued “it’s really difficult for everyone involved”.

Call for more information

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