

Communication, accountability getting people back to work at GSK

Company sees impressive results, with shorter referral lags and leaves, fewer claims BY SARAH DOBSON

A FEW YEARS AGO, pharmaceutical and health-care company GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) realized it needed to make improvements to its disability management system. For one, the system didn't align with the company's corporate mission of improving the lives and health of patients, and a focus on employees was lacking.

"As a health-care company, we want our internal programs to model what we do for the public, have that reflected internally just as we do externally," says Shannon Meijer, director of HR services and employee wellness at GSK in Mississauga, Ont.

Second, once an employee went off on disability leave, the communication between the company and employee almost stopped, she says.

"We didn't have a structured program and, as a result, people would go off on leave and it would be awkward or uncomfortable, inappropriate, for any medical information to be discussed. So a manager didn't know really what their role was or responsibilities... so you basically just shy away from the conversation at all and (say), 'Let me know when you're ready to come back to work,'" she says.

"The problem is that the responsibility rested entirely with the employee to come back and let us know when they were ready to return to work, and communication between the employee and manager was almost non-existent."

To fix the problem, GSK — which has 2,700 employees in Canada

and a global workforce of about 100,000 — decided it needed the help of Organizational Solutions.

The disability management specialist has all the medical information and expertise to interpret what the medical data is saying, says Meijer, so it's able to associate the illness with the expectations in the medical community around how long a person would need to be out of work and recovering and, more specifically, what his limitations are with that illness.

"The overall focus was really creating a supportive program to make sure that people were able to get into appropriate treatment and care, and come back to work as soon as possible, with great results," says Liz Scott, principal and CEO of Organizational Solutions in Toronto.

GSK is a very employee-centric organization, so it was about making sure individuals had support while on disability leave, she says, and mapping out a

“The overall focus was really creating a supportive program to make sure that people were able to get into appropriate treatment and care,”

specific process flow chart. "The process flow chart starts right at day one and takes us through to return to work. So that's a really strong component, and it's also used in the training of the managers and the employees, so everybody knows what's going to happen next — no surprises."

Changing roles

As part of the change, there was a big shift at GSK to focusing on the manager's role in the equation. The manager and employee now remain in close contact throughout the leave and work on solutions together, allowing the employee to come back to work as soon as possible, says

Meijer.

"Where they were hands-off and not involved in communicating with the employee before, it is absolutely the manager's

responsibility to stay in touch with the employee and they have the facilitation of the third-party disability management specialist to support the conversation."

Very often, when Organizational Solutions goes into organizations to do audits and assessments of disability management programs, managers will say, "If you tell us what to do, we can do it," says Scott. "So the more information we can get into that manager's hands, the better it's going to be."

GSK took a soft-launch approach with the change and, instead of rolling it out broadly, approached managers who were experiencing short-term disability leaves or absences within their team.

"I wouldn't say that there was resistance or pushback because this was always an area that managers felt uncomfortable with," says Meijer. "By bringing in the clarity of what their role is and by having the third party there who

is facilitating the conversation, I actually think most managers felt this was an enhancement. They always had the accountability but I think they just didn't know what to do with it. So this has allowed them to be clear on what their role is and for us as an organization to be able to hold the managers accountable. HR's role in disability management

"We're trying to work on really what their capabilities are, not their disability,"

has also been better articulated, says Meijer, and it now receives high-level reports from specialists that don't contain confidential information but support the employee's absence and detail the length of the leave and any interventions required from the company.

HR was trying to do too much, says Scott.

"You've got to be able to say who owns the employment relationships, and who owns the employment relationship is the manager and employee, and HR is a resource, like payroll is a resource or IT is a resource. But they're not the folks that own the relationship, so that was

certainly a learning that they had."

Impressive results

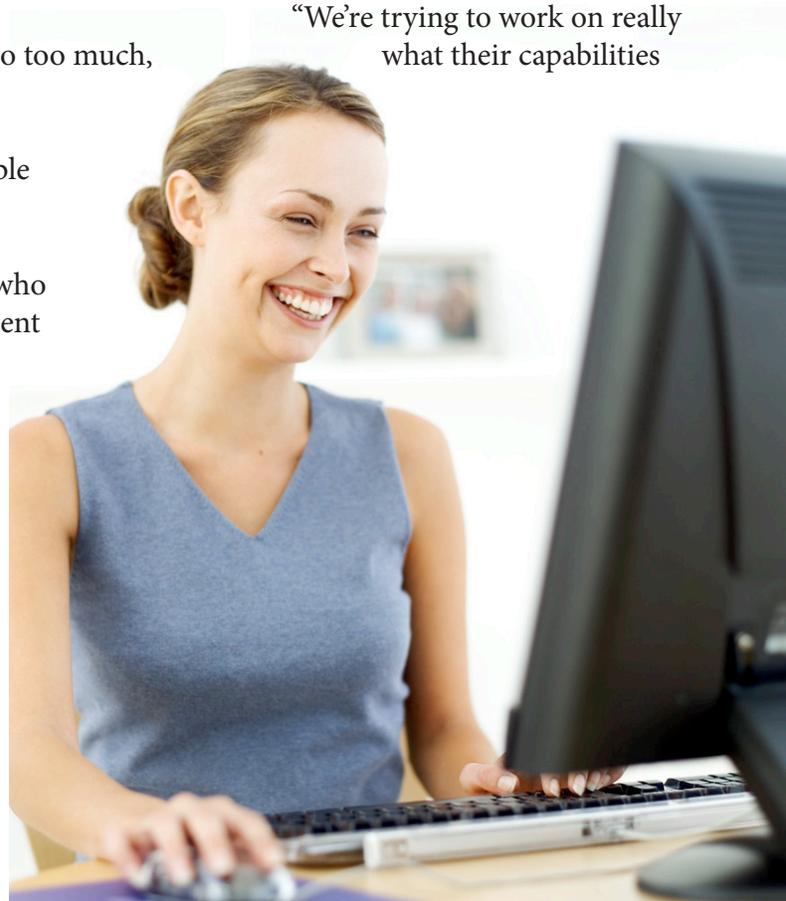
One of the greatest advantages of the improved system is people have been able to return to work sooner, sometimes with lighter or modified duties, so they're able to engage in the workforce, to feel the satisfaction of delivering on their job and ease back into work as their illness will allow, says Meijer.

"We're not trying to get people back to work, we're trying to get people back to healthy," she says.

"Sometimes when an employee goes off on leave and the employer's nowhere to be seen, with the connection being lost, there is a purpose... and value that work brings to an individual and, in many cases, that can actually aid in the recovery."

Formerly, if somebody was off sick, it was about focusing on what was wrong.

"We're trying to work on really what their capabilities



are, not their disability,” says Meijer. Another big result is the number of claims going to long-term disability (LTD) has been reduced, she says, from an average of 65 before Organizational Solutions to 30 in 2012.

It’s about going from a “We’re on opposite sides perspective” to “We’re all on the same side here — to get you well and back to work,” says Scott.

“What we notice with that approach is we see a significant decline in the number of frivolous claims because now there’s accountability. (For example), you can’t be off two weeks and not talk to someone because as soon as you say you’ll be off, someone will reach out and call you — so it creates that whole accountability.”

And since long-term disability is an employee-paid expense at GSK, employees’ rates are based on their experience, says Meijer.

“With the introduction of this program, we’ve been able to reduce the number of cases going to long-term disability, reducing our experience rates, and each employee has money back in their pockets because the rates to pay for long-term disability have been reduced. So that’s the big, big positive one.”

The number of days employees are taking off for illness has also been reduced, along with the referral lags, says Scott. In 2007, about 40 per cent of GSK employee absences longer than seven days weren’t reported until after 20 days, she says. But by 2011, with the improved system, the vast majority of claims, about 90 per cent, were

reported in the first five days, and by the 10th day, only a small margin of claims were reported late.

“That makes such a huge difference because we’re able to intervene and get the person back to work or into appropriate treatment.”

© Copyright Canadian HR Reporter,
Thomson Reuters Canada Limited.
All rights reserved.



ORGANIZATIONAL SOLUTIONS INC.
SOLUTIONS ORGANISATIONNELLES INC.

“The Disability Management Difference”

Organizational Solutions Inc. is a National leading provider of Disability Management, Workers’ Compensation Claims Management, Return to Work Programs and much more. The firm has offices from coast to coast employing Health Professionals, Paralegals, and Disability Management and Workers’ Compensation Specialists

Our unique and highly specialized services will help control both the human and financial cost of disability to your organization, with incredible returns on investment. Available for both work related and non work related illnesses or injuries, we use an objective results driven and specialized approach to employ health care professionals as the first point of contact for you and your employees. This enables us to manage your absences and claims fast and effectively, consistently reducing durations of time away from work and improving outcomes in every type of business.

Call or contact Sales today for a quote, a brief chat or arrange an informal meeting.

Tel : 1- 866-674-7656 ext 2243.

Email : sales@orgsoln.com.

Web : www.orgsoln.com