

Returning To Work – What's The Plan

Managing employees who return to work after sickness is normally something left to the HR Department when in fact it is an area of safety management often overlooked, writes the GGF's Phil Pinnington



We all get sick at some time. That's a fact, whether it's the flu or a back problem or indeed a sports injury, writes the GGF's Phil Pinnington.

It's not the employer's role to manage people's health outside work unless it directly affects their ability to do their job, however it is a responsible employer's duty to make sure that work doesn't make the condition worse.

Since 2004 when the FIT note was introduced, whereby a GP could sign your employee fit to work, certain provisions were often required. From my own operational management experience in the transport industry this would often be a difficult conversation. GP's can only recom-

mend work modifications when they fully understand the job their patient does.

Dangerous decisions

I've lost count of the number of return to work interviews where tanker drivers have been signed fit to work and are taking prescribed medication that could impede attention when driving. The patient may have felt they were clear to the GP about their job but that conversation may well have been misunderstood or misinterpreted and the most innocent mistake could have resulted in a major accident.

As employers there are many pitfalls and challenges with managing staff but evaluating whether an employee is safe to

work is important. Not knowing would not be a defense should a tragedy occur so asking relevant questions such as:

- Are you taking medication and if so does your GP know what's involved in your job?
- Do you feel able to return to duties?
- Do we need to make any modifications to your job and if so for how long?

Such questions may be seen as intrusive but I believe that by asking you are showing a genuine interest in their wellbeing. This can help foster a positive relationship and in turn enable employers to manage any safety risks more effectively. **f**