Working with a disability, injury or health condition: A guide for employees

Developed by:
Staff Support and Rehabilitation Advisor
Human Resources Division
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Introduction

The University of Queensland supports and contributes to the provision of reasonable disability adjustment, workplace health management and rehabilitation for employees whose capacity to carry out their duties is affected by disability, injury or a health condition.

The University has a duty to all staff members who are working with a (temporary or permanent) health condition to provide reasonable adjustments to enable the performance of the inherent requirements of the job.

Sometimes a health condition requires a staff member to take extended leave. In such circumstances the aim is to ensure that return-to-work occurs as soon as medically advisable. Early return-to-work programs benefit both the staff member and the University.

The University supports a flexible approach to disability adjustment and return-to-work programs so that, where practicable and operationally reasonable, the adjustment and rehabilitation needs of an individual can be accommodated.

Typically, medical guidance is provided by a treating, registered health practitioner/s and any adjustment and/or rehabilitation plan focuses on the pattern of work and/or adjustment to substantive duties. Some adjustments may be ongoing with regular review and others may be temporary. In terms of return-to-work it is expected that rehabilitation goals should be achieved within a realistic time frame (usually no more than 12 months following initial return) and should take reasonable account of any organisational constraints within the staff member’s work unit.

Steps for an employee working with a disability, illness or health condition (‘health condition’)

Talk with your Supervisor, your Manager, HR or Staff Support and Rehabilitation Advisor about your situation.

Although it can be difficult to disclose, the University cannot respond to your needs unless we are aware of the issue/s, at least to the extent that it impacts on your capacity to perform your duties.

Rehabilitation staff are trained to deal with such disclosures. Alternatively, you may like to talk to your treating practitioner or the University’s free, external counselling provider 1300 360 364.
In confiding, you need only tell the University about the aspects of the health condition that have implications for some aspect of your work performance and/or safety, or the safety of others.

Confidentiality

Whilst any information you provide to the University is not entirely confidential (e.g., there may be a duty of care to inform your manager), every effort will be made to ensure only those who ‘need to know’ are informed and disclosure will be discussed with you. Only information with implications for your work is appropriately shared – this is referred to as the ‘functional implications’. UQ has policies in place to appropriately manage the provision of personal information and the conduct of staff in receipt of such information (Information Privacy and Code of Conduct for Staff).

Support

Be aware that if you wish to bring a support person, e.g. union representative, friend or colleague for support, please let your supervisor know when you make the appointment, as a matter of courtesy. You can seek further advice on how to manage these meetings from your HR Advisor, Rehabilitation staff, or Equity Services staff as appropriate.

Consent to talk with your treating practitioners

Consider providing the University your written consent to liaise with your treating practitioner/s so that we can best understand and respond to your health needs.

The University can only discuss your medical issues with your treating practitioner/s with your authorisation (except in cases of a medical emergency, for example).

If you provide consent we will write to your doctor/s, asking specific questions about the nature of the health condition, the functional implications for your work, a suggested work schedule and any suggested adjustments to your tasks. Any information returned to the University will be retained on a confidential rehabilitation file (not your personnel file), access to which is extremely limited.

You can revoke your consent (in writing) at any time.

Without your consent and subsequent ability to liaise with your treating practitioner/s, the University will be limited in the guidance it receives and hence the support it can offer.
Medical guidance

Alternatively, talk with your treating practitioner/s about their professional opinion regarding any reasonable work adjustment/s that would be assistive and, if applicable, strategies for your maintenance at work or your supported return to work.

Ask them to support you by providing appropriate written guidance to the University.

Meetings

It is important to participate in meetings with rehabilitation staff and/or your supervisor/manager to discuss medical guidance, your work preference needs and an agreed rehabilitation/work adjustment/support plan should arise from these meetings.

Regular meetings should occur to review progress and to update any agreed plan (e.g. to gradually increase your work hours in a return-to-work program).

Discuss any parallel concerns you might have about issues such as a pending performance review, what (if any) information you might like to share with workmates etc., operational requirements of your work unit.

For information regarding the University’s policy and procedure regarding Medical Conditions Affecting Performance, please see PPL 5.70.13