

# Welfare Working Group Forum

## Is Being on a Benefit Bad for Your Health?

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# Without Work all Life Goes Rotten – Albert Camus

- BMJ Editorial October 1992 Richard Smith
- “Unemployment raises the chance that a man will die in the next decade by about a third, and for those in middle age – with the biggest commitments – the chance doubles. The men are most likely to die from suicide, cancer, and accidents and violence.”

# Why?

- Personal Experience
- Evidence
  - Compensation & Health
  - Work & Health
  - Early Intervention

# Compensation & Health

- Compensable Injuries & Health Outcomes – AFOM 2000
  - Compensation associated with poorer health outcomes

# Is Work Good for your Health & Well-Being? (Waddell & Burton 2006)

“There is a strong association between worklessness and poor health. This may be partly a health selection effect, but it is also to a large extent cause and effect. There is strong evidence that unemployment is generally harmful to health including:

- Higher mortality
- Poorer general health
- Poorer mental health
- Higher medical consultation, medication consumption and hospital admission rates.

# Work & Health

- Health Risk = smoking 10 packets of cigarettes/day (Ross 1995)
- Suicide in young men 6+ months out of work is increased 40 fold (Wessely, 2004)
- Suicide rate 6 times higher in long term out of work (Bartley et al, 2005)
- Health risk & decreased life expectancy impact more than many “killer” diseases (Waddell & Aylward, 2005)
- Greater risk than the most dangerous jobs e.g. construction/North Sea (Aylward, 2007)

# Work & Health

## Preventing Needless Work Disability by Helping People stay Employed – ACOEM 2006

- Introduced “SAW” language
- Noted the incidence of long absence associated with minor injuries
- Recommended focus on the process
- “Common sense evidence abounds that keeping people productively employed is good for them and society”

# Work & Health

## – Working for a Healthier Tomorrow – UK – 2007

- Dame Carol Black noted:

“For most people their work is a key factor in their self worth, family esteem and identity. So if they become sick and are not helped quickly enough, they can all too easily find themselves on a downward spiral into long term sickness and a life on benefits”

# Work & Health

- Dame Carol Recommended:
  - New Fit for Work service be piloted for early stages of sickness
  - Service extended to those on incapacity and other out of work benefits
  - Outdated paper based sick note be replaced with “fit note” stating what people can do, not what they can’t

# Vocational Rehabilitation – What Works, for Whom, and When? (Waddell, Burton, Kendall 2008)

“The advice and management given in primary care has a major and lasting impact on the individual’s (and their family’s and employer’s) beliefs about the health condition and how it should be managed”



The Royal Australasian  
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## REALISING THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF WORK

### A POSITION STATEMENT

# “Realising the Health Benefits of Work” - AFOEM 2010

- To date the findings are unambiguous. In general, work is good for health and wellbeing.
- As physicians, we see the firsthand the personal tragedies that long term work absence, unemployment and work disability wreak on individuals, families and communities.
- Rubbing salt into the wound, extended time off work often sees a worsening rather than an improvement in symptoms and conditions it is supposed to ameliorate.

# Its the System

- Health Practitioners
  - Chronic condition management
  - Expectation setting
- Employers
  - Understanding the evidence
  - Knowing the costs
- Case Managers
  - Early support
- Employees
  - Self help through health literacy

# Is Being on a Benefit Bad for Your Health?

Yes

# Can anything be done?

Yes