

Dying to Work Campaign

Terminally ill employees

Many workers get a serious illness at some time in their working lives. They may require time off, often many months, to get treatment or recover. There is good guidance that has been produced by the TUC and others to deal with cases of long-term illness, or return to work for those who are disabled as a result of an illness or injury.

However, sometimes there is no effective treatment. In these cases the worker may face a time of huge emotional stress, fear and uncertainty. Trade unions can try to ensure that when that happens, they try to remove any additional stress and worry.

A terminal illness is a disease that cannot be cured or adequately treated and there is a reasonable expectation that the patient will die within a relatively short period of time. Usually, but not always, they are progressive diseases such as cancer or advanced heart disease.

UK Social Security legislation defines a terminal illness as: “a progressive disease where death as a consequence of that disease can reasonably be expected within 6 months”, however many patients can have a terminal illness and survive much longer than 6 months.

Implications of a terminal diagnosis

Being told that you are to die as a result of a disease for which there is no cure or effective treatment and that you only have months, or at best a year or so to live is a traumatic event and everyone will react differently.

Sometimes the nature of the illness is such that the person is unlikely to be able to work again. In other cases, a person may decide that they do not want to work anymore and would rather spend their remaining time with their family and friends, getting their affairs in order, or simply doing what they want. However, a lot of workers with a terminal diagnosis decide that they want to continue working as long as they can, either because they need the financial security or because they find that their work can be a helpful distraction from their illness. Whichever choice a person makes, they should be able to expect help and support from their employer. Unfortunately the experience of many workers is that their employer is either unsympathetic or puts up barriers to them continuing in work.

If a worker with a terminal illness loses their job they lose their income. They can also lose any death in service payments they have earned through a life-time of work but are only payable to those that die while still in employment.

Did you know...

Cancer Research UK are projecting that 1 in 3 people will be diagnosed with cancer. Currently 1 in 10 new cancer cases are found in people under 50. (Over 33k cases a year)

5 Steps to the Charter

Step 1

Check that your employer has not already signed up to the TUC Dying to Work charter

The TUC Dying to Work charter is already protecting over half a million working people in the UK and this number is growing nearly every week.

Step 2

Involve your union

Raise the campaign with your Trade Union branch and ask your rep to raise the charter with your employer. If your workplace has more than one recognised union then ensure their representatives are also involved in the discussions.

Step 3

Encourage your employer to sign the voluntary charter

Unions should be clear about what they want from their employer. Just getting a vague commitment is not enough. Union negotiators should seek agreement that their employer will:

- **Review sick pay and sickness absence procedures** and include a specific statement that they will not dismiss any person with a terminal diagnosis because of their condition.
- **Ensure that they have an Employee Assistance Programme** that has the capacity and competency to provide support to any person with a terminal illness, including access to counselling and financial advice.
- **Provide training to line managers and all HR staff** on dealing with terminal illness, including how to discuss future plans with any worker who has a diagnosis of a terminal illness, and on what adaptations to work arrangements that may be necessary.
- **Adopt the Dying to Work Charter** and notify all employees that they have made the commitments contained in it.

Step 4

Inform the TUC

Once the employer and the recognised unions are happy that the commitments within the charter have been met, please inform the TUC of your intention to sign using the contact details provided.

In your correspondence, please include:

- Dates of availability for a public signing ceremony
- The logo of your organisation and union(s) signing the charter
- The names of those signing the charter on behalf of the employer and union(s)
- The names and quotes for draft press releases – The TUC will be happy to liaise with your organisation's press department.
- The number of workers to be covered by the Charter. We will add these to the national total
- Confirmation that photos can be taken at the event which the TUC can share on social media, the campaign website and other outlets

Step 5

Sign the Charter

The TUC will provide a customised copy of the charter for the public signing ceremony which will be attended by a representative of the campaign. The TUC will also work with your internal press department to co-ordinate press releases to generate media coverage in both the local and national press and broadcast media.

After the signing, your organisation will have officially joined the growing number of employers from across the public and private sector which have made this important commitment to their employees. Your organisation's details will be added to our website and the charter will be left with the employer to display as they see fit.



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