

Occupational physiotherapy offering helps NHS Trust increase employee productivity

Phil Clayton

Background

Medical evidence shows that physiotherapy intervention is most effective in the first eight weeks of a musculoskeletal injury.

To help its employees recover more safely and quickly from injuries and conditions which required treatment, Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust (BDCFT) turned to Physio Med to provide an occupational-health physiotherapy service.

The service provides all the BDCFT staff members with swift access to physiotherapy at three of its sites, enabling them to reduce their pain levels, increasing their productivity in the safest manner possible and facilitating a quicker return to work.

Brief

As with any job within the NHS, some roles at the BDCFT can frequently be physically demanding, with the potential for staff to suffer injury or musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) as a result.

With a staff of 3,000 employed by the BDCFT, and an average wait time to access NHS physiotherapy treatment of 14.3 weeks (or 71.5 days), some employees had the potential to be absent from work for prolonged periods. Additionally,

some employees were working with reduced productivity, and 43.5 per cent of those that entered the Physio Med service had bared their injuries for a period in excess of 12 weeks. Therefore, the BDCFT needed to find a way to help its employee's access quality physiotherapy treatment much more quickly to:

- reduce employee discomfort and pain levels;
- minimise associated absence and facilitate an early return to work;
- improve productivity;
- reduce the risk of further absence, due to recurrence of MSD, by gathering information on the causes of injuries; and
- provide the above in the most cost-effective manner.

The BDCFT was also eager to offer on-site treatment to make the access to the physiotherapy provision more flexible to its staff and help to minimise disruption to their personal lives. Furthermore, for the staff-members who were at work with pain whilst receiving treatment, it provided a much more convenient service.

Solution

Having worked in partnership with Physio Med for a number of years,

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Shorter versions of the article have been published in "*Occupational Health & Wellbeing*" magazine and on the website of "*HR Magazine*".

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BDC FT asked the provider to review how the service was being delivered to its staff so as to improve results even further.

The service allows for fast access to face-to-face physiotherapy treatment through referrals from the BDCFT's Occupational Health Department. Having successfully offered treatment through its network of clinics for several years, Physio Med made a number of changes to make the service even more accessible within working hours and therefore reduce the impact of treatment on employees' personal time.

The most significant change saw Physio Med offering a five-days-a-week practice across three of BDCFT's locations. Two senior chartered physiotherapists operated across the Lynfield Mount, Canalside and Hillside Bridge locations, enabling staff to easily access the service.

Outcome

Over the course of 2015, a total of 319 appropriate referrals were made to Physio Med, with initial assessment appointments taking place within an average of just 2.5 working days following referral.

At the point of referral, 21 per cent of employees were absent from work and 79 per cent were at work in pain with an average productivity of 64 per cent, highlighting the hidden cost of presenteeism.

Of those employees who were off sick at the point of referral, 84 per cent returned to work following treatment, and 97.5 per cent of employees referred whilst at work in pain were safely maintained at work.

By ensuring employees were both referred and treated quickly, those that used the service reported an average reduction in pain of 79 per cent, as well as an increase in productivity and function in real terms of 33 per cent (from 51 to 84 per cent). This is equivalent to 1.65 days pp/pw working a week.

Based on the 297 employees discharged from the service over the period of 12 months, BDCFT estimates it saved 6,762 working days, delivering an estimated saving of £676,200, which equates to an return on investment (ROI) figure of 15 :1.

Those referred for treatment received an average of 4.9 physiotherapy sessions, including the initial assessment.

In financial terms, the service has bridged the gap in the NHS physiotherapy waiting list, helping BDCFT to reduce sickness absence and improve productivity – saving thousands of working days in the process.

Physio Med also reports back to BDCFT on a host of criteria – including cause of injury, anatomical injury site, referring locations, job roles and further breakdown of the service impact on pain levels and

productivity – identifying trends to help BDCFT put practices and measures in place to reduce future injuries and issues.

Outcomes included the following:

- significant reduction in long-term sickness absence due to musculoskeletal disorders;
- 79 per cent average reduction in reported pain;
- 33 per cent increase, from 51 to 84 per cent, in recorded productivity and function per referred person (post-treatment), equivalent to 1.65 days per week/65 per cent over all;
- 84 per cent of those off work at the point of referral returned to work;
- 97.5 per cent of employees referred whilst at work in pain were safely maintained at work;
- improved productivity and function equated to an overall cost saving to BDCFT of £676,200 based on the 297 employees discharged from the service and using an average cost of £100 per employee per day; and
- this equates to a ROI figure of 15 :1.

Joanne Hoban, occupational health and wellbeing manager at BDCFT said: “The employees at Bradford District Care Foundation Trust provide vital community services, so it is in everyone's best interests to ensure they are as fit as possible to do their jobs to the best of their abilities”.

“By the nature of many of the roles, employees can be susceptible to musculoskeletal injuries and approximately 29 per cent of employees who sought

treatment in 2015 had conditions that were aggravated by work. Having an occupational physiotherapy provision has speeded up our physiotherapy response times enormously, helping employees to reduce the pain of these conditions and get back to work as quickly as possible. We are delighted to be able to provide this service, and

the feedback we have received from colleagues has been incredibly positive too”.

About the author

Phil Clayton spent eight years as a regional manager in the recruitment industry, before joining Physio Med as the managing director in 2002. Phil has recently overseen the conversion of the

new Physio Med headquarters and prides himself on ensuring the business provides high levels of customer service and exceptional value for money. Established in 1990, Physio Med provides workplace physiotherapy solutions to businesses across a wide range of sectors, through 780+ physiotherapy practices across the UK. Phil Clayton can be contacted at: Phil.Clayton@physiomed.co.uk