



ARMA CHARTER FOR WORK FOR PEOPLE AFFECTED BY MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS IN THE UK

Over 6.5 million people of working age in the UK have a musculoskeletal disorder (MSD).¹ The term MSDs covers a wide range of conditions including back pain and work-related limb disorders, which can be caused or aggravated by particular kinds of work; and systemic, chronic conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis and ankylosing spondylitis.

MSDs are the second biggest cause of work-limiting health problems and sickness absence in the UK², responsible for up to 10.8 million lost working days in 2008/09³. This represents a huge cost to the UK economy, not only in terms of reduced productivity and lost working days, but also because MSDs are common causes of individuals claiming Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). The cost of MSDs to society has been estimated at over £7 billion at 2007 prices.⁴ There is also a personal cost borne by individuals due to the persistent pain and stiffness that MSDs can cause. This has a major impact on their quality of life and can result in more days off work.⁵

These issues are now more important than ever given the pressing need to reduce the cost of ill-health to the public purse, and to retain valuable skills and knowledge within the workforce to help drive the UK's economic recovery. Evidence shows that people with MSDs want to work but require more help and support to make this possible.⁶

This Charter calls on all stakeholders – policymakers, employers, healthcare providers, employee representatives and the people whose lives are affected by MSDs – to take positive steps to:

- Prevent work-related MSDs
- Provide prompt diagnosis and the most effective treatment for MSDs
- Improve the services and support that enable affected people to work

This Charter calls for:

Policymakers to prioritise MSDs through the introduction and implementation of national-level policies:

- Recognise the importance of retention in or return to work as an outcome of successful patient care. This should be reflected in national policy guidance (e.g. NICE) and health service frameworks e.g. the Musculoskeletal Services Framework (MSF)
- Promote a managed transition from Employment and Support Allowance as part of a phased return to the workplace
- Ensure observance of existing legislation such as the right to request flexible working arrangements and reasonable workplace adjustments in the Disability Discrimination Act
- Provide further practical support to small and medium-sized businesses, and encourage their take-up of occupational health resources such as the new Health for Work Adviceline

Employers and workplaces to understand and address the needs of employees with MSDs:

- Comply with musculoskeletal Health and Safety Regulations, and relevant best practice, to prevent work-related MSDs, to facilitate early reporting of symptoms, and to promote access to effective treatment

- Train managers to help prevent MSDs occurring in the workplace and highlight the importance of intervening early to support job retention as a way of reducing the risk of long-term sick leave
- Offer flexible working arrangements to accommodate the fluctuating nature of some MSDs, and the need for time off to attend routine and emergency medical appointments
- Facilitate contact with appropriate health professionals e.g. physiotherapists or occupational health nurses and therapists once their employee notifies them of their condition in order to develop a work plan and pain management programme (when required) that fully supports participation in work
- Consult and engage with employees and their representatives to develop positive employment practices

Healthcare providers to re-focus on the ‘capacity’ of their patients, and to take responsibility for providing work-focused health advice and support or referring to an appropriate specialist:

- Utilise the new ‘Fit Note’ to strengthen their relationship with employers and patients with a focus on helping people with work-limiting MSDs return to work
- Work with partners in the NHS, voluntary sector, social services and in employment centres to deliver integrated services at a local level, providing holistic advice and services to patients to support earlier diagnosis and treatment
- Professional bodies to ensure its members are supported and educated to promote the fullest possible working life as a desirable clinical outcome for people with MSDs

People whose lives are affected by MSDs to demand action and support from their Government, employer and healthcare provider:

- Join together to request better and faster access to effective treatment and support to help them, where possible, recover from their condition, or otherwise manage their condition and stay productive in work
- Take responsibility for improving their own health and wellbeing through supported self-management of their condition where possible
- Maintain an open dialogue with their employer about their condition to support workplaces in making timely and reasonable adjustments

ARMA is launching a ‘Work Charter’ to support people living with musculoskeletal disorders in the UK. The campaign and launch for the Work Charter in the four nations is being co-ordinated by Weber Shandwick on behalf of ARMA, and is jointly sponsored by an educational grant from Napp Pharmaceutical Holdings Limited and Abbott Laboratories.

¹ Vaughan-Jones H, Barham L (2009) *Healthy Work; Challenges and Opportunities to 2030*, a report for Bupa in partnership with The Oxford Health Alliance, The Work Foundation and RAND Europe, available at http://www.bupa.com/jahia/webdav/site/bupacom/shared/Documents/PDFs/our-commitment/publication/health_at_work-report.pdf

² Work Foundation, *Fit for Work: Musculoskeletal Disorders and Labour Market Participation*, 2007. Available at http://www.theworkfoundation.com/assets/docs/publications/44_fit_for_work_small.pdf

³ Health and Safety statistics 2008/09, published by the Health and Safety Executive. Available at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/overall/hssh0809.pdf>

⁴ Work Foundation, *Fit for Work: Musculoskeletal Disorders and Labour Market Participation*, 2007. Available at http://www.theworkfoundation.com/assets/docs/publications/44_fit_for_work_small.pdf

⁵ British Pain Society, http://www.britishpainsociety.org/media_surveys.htm

⁶ Survey by the National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society, ‘I Want to Work’, 2007

