Businesses urged to support 42,000 people with dementia who are still of working age

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Alzheimer's Society is calling for all businesses to create a dementia-friendly working environment and give staff with dementia and carers the opportunity to continue to play an active part in the workforce.

To support this call, a brand new, practical guide has been launched for employers to support staff affected by dementia.

One in five (20%) people living with dementia are under the age of retirement and could be making a valuable contribution to businesses. With the UK statutory retirement age rising, and the number of people with dementia expected to increase to one million by 2021, many more people will develop dementia while still in employment.

The guide: 'Creating a dementia-friendly workplace: A practical guide for employers'; sets out the best practice for businesses. Employers can expect to see a range of benefits including: staff retention; development of empowering and inclusive policies and cultures in the workplace; and importantly ensure employers are fulfilling their legal responsibilities outlined in the Equality Act 2010.

Many people who develop dementia fear the reactions of colleagues and employers, worrying they might not be supported to continue at work or would be discriminated against. The guide helps businesses to create an environment where people with dementia and their carers feel confident to talk about their condition openly.

The Dementia Friendly Communities programme focuses on improving inclusion and quality of life for people living with dementia by making communities more aware of and understanding of the condition. There are already more than 20 businesses who are part of the Dementia Friendly Communities programme, including Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Lloyds Banking Group.

Jeremy Hughes, Chief Executive at Alzheimer's Society said:

'There is a widespread lack of understanding of dementia. For too long dementia has been seen as only affecting older people who are retired, but with over 40,000 people living with the condition under the age of retirement, this is simply not the case. Likewise, many carers of people with dementia would like to be able to continue earning.

'Those diagnosed with early onset dementia, commonly have significant financial commitments, such as mortgages or family dependants. They need to stay in paid employment for as long as they are able. People with dementia can still make a meaningful contribution with the right support. Employers that invest in awareness raising and rethink their approach to dementia will retain skills and experience in the workplace and also ensure people with dementia and carers are more financially secure.'

Wendy Papworth, Head of Diversity and Inclusion at Barclays said:

'As with any condition, employers have a responsibility to support people affected by dementia to help them continue working or supporting them with information about leaving work; such as discussing retirement options and providing access to financial advice.

'This guide gives employers the chance to kick start change and face up to the challenges and realities of supporting employees living with dementia and their carers.'

Paul Edwards, 58, from Chesterfield, works part time and was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in 2013. He said:

'I feared after diagnosis that I would have to stop working, but my employer has made it possible for me to continue working by making reasonable adjustments to my role – allowing me to do the things I am best at and making sure my colleagues are open and supportive about my condition.'

'I'm fortunate that I have an employer that responds quickly and understandingly to my situation while balancing the needs of the business. Others may not be so lucky and there's a lot to be done to ensure that employers generally know the steps they should be taking to support their workforce living with dementia.'

Top tips for making your business dementia friendly include:

1. Creating a dementia friendly work environment – establish a setting in which every employee understands dementia and feels able to talk about it. If you provide public-facing services, you might also consider how you can make them more accessible to customers or users who have dementia.

2. Support employees in the early stages – opening the channels of communication are essential. Find a suitable place to speak, with minimal background noise, get the employees full attention, be patient and allow them plenty of time, as it may take them longer to process information. Check with the person that you have understood correctly what they have said and listen carefully to what the person has said.

3. Provide ongoing support and management - dementia is a progressive condition and a person's symptoms will change over time, therefore it is important to continue to meet regularly to monitor and review the situation. You may need to make reasonable adjustments to the job role or physical features of the buildings, fittings or equipment.

4. Plan for leaving work – when it becomes clear that a member of staff is no longer able to fulfil their role, support the person to agree a dignified exit package and strategy.

5. Make working more flexible for carers – keeping open channels of communication are essential. Under the Equality Act 2010, carers have the right to request flexible working, and the right to request time off to look after dependants in an emergency.

To download the guide visit: http://bit.ly/1Ob4fnQ

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