

**Hazards
Campaign**



www.workstress.net

The UK National Work-Stress Network

SUMMER NEWS 2005

Sick claimants lose holiday pay

Thousands of sick workers will no longer be able to claim holiday pay, following a recent Court of Appeal ruling, employment experts have warned.

Judges ruled that employees off work sick for a lengthy period do not have an automatic right to four weeks of annual leave, the basic entitlement under Working Time Regulations.

The judges confirmed that workers forfeited holiday rights in years when they were completely unable to work due to ill health.

The ruling also means long-term sick employees will not be entitled to claim compensation for holiday they have not taken, if they are made redundant.

The judgment reverses the ruling of an Employment Appeal Tribunal in 2002, which said staff should still be able to claim holidays, or pay in lieu, even if they had been off work for more than 12 months.

"The court is saying that the statutory right to leave and holiday pay must be tied to the contribution that the worker makes to the employer's business," said John Davies, at the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants.

"If the worker is absent on long-term sick leave and makes no active contribution, then he or she does not qualify for the standard rights under the regulations."

All employees are entitled to four weeks of paid annual leave, including bank holidays, once they have worked for an employer for at least 13 weeks. Many have to endure extreme lengths of sickness absence, with the added stresses of low or zero pay, and/or regularly assessed eligibility to state benefits.

This adds to the required recovery times and the fact that they are seemingly denied access to normal family holiday time with pay is discouraging to say the least.

The UK National Workstress Network

Extends its best wishes to Delegates to the 2005 Hazards Conference at Leeds university for the weekend of July 30th. We look forward to further participation in the weekend's events, and to the success of yet another gathering of like-minded people whose focus in the prevention of workplace risks and the improvements for all workers in their working conditions, and their influence on the safety agenda across the nation.

Have you booked your place?!

Stress Network 6th Annual Conference

Saturday 19th November 2005, 10.00 till 4.00
NASUWT Hillscourt Conference Centre,
Rednal, Nr Birmingham

"Ensuring a Life-Work Balance"

Speakers, Workshops
Accommodation Available

Booking forms on www.workstress.net

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Convenor's Report

Hazards Conference 2005 is nearly upon us, and we hope to have this issue of our newsletter published for delegates attending at Leeds University.

Once more, UK Stress Network facilitates workshops on Stress Risk Assessments and the implications for the HSE Management Standards – not that there's much evidence of their implementation!

I always find these weekends so stimulating – a chance to meet up with old friends, to share experiences again and to learn that we are making a difference, albeit rather slowly at times!

My own daytime work on behalf of teachers, daily reinforces my convictions that there is still a long way to go to get employers and managers to acknowledge their duty to employees, not to cause further physical or psychological damage.

The daily chant of 'improving standards' come what may seems for many managers their only daily responsibility. When their efforts create problems for employees, the blame is shifted away from the employer for failures to adapt to the needs and the good of the organisation.

And with the vivid impact of the terrorist bombings in London on the lives of ordinary citizens, we must also give thought to the brunt of the work falling on the emergency services.

These brave men and women endure the most horrendous of working conditions, retrieving the remains of those who perished, and the valuable evidence needed to track down the spineless killers.

Post-Trauma stress affects so many over a very long time, and whilst its causes can never be eradicated, there is a need to ensure that all forms of back-up and support are available for those who endure it, now and in the years and decades into the future. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families and friends of the dead and injured and with the rescue teams as well.

Ian Draper (Network Convenor)

Personal support mechanisms?

From time to time we are asked to bring to readers' attention, the kind of self-help strategies that are marketed through stress management consultants or publications. One such publication that has come our way is a small volume by Andrew Vass, "*Beat Depression with self-help techniques*", published by APEX at £6.99 (ISBN 1-904444-25-3).

The network view has always been that the fundamental action for employers is to address and remove the root causes of workplace stress, anxiety and depression. However we also recognise that supportive coping self help and employer led strategies sitting alongside this action will assist workers to address some of the problems they face. The Hatton Appeal Judgement also acknowledged that employer provision of support services is a key factor in relief of work-related illnesses of a psychological nature. Employers who make such provision are less likely to be found responsible for the damage to health claims that may be generated by employees.

Vass explores in a supportive and helpful way, without the repetition of detailed empirical research programmes, the benefits of self-counselling, assertiveness, aspects of cognitive behavioural therapy and self-assessment tasks with brief explanations of suitable techniques and exercises which are designed to help replace negative thoughts with more positive approaches.

He explores the benefits of an identified framework which can be applied to personal learning which develops a flexible and yet structured approach to self-help.

Brief glossaries support task-based approaches to a range of strategies, threading a way through stressors in all aspects of life, including aspects of work, family life and relationships.

The volume concludes with thoughts about its sources of inspiration – Carl Rogers who developed the concept of counselling in the 1950s; Albert Ellis, writer on emotive behavioural therapy; David Burns, a cognitive behavioural therapist and others.

This is quite a useful volume of guidance for those who are able to analyse their own situations supporting themselves through difficult moments created by the unrelenting depressive factors in our lives.

Nevertheless this approach still requires the collaborative support of positive workplace action to relieve the causes of these tensions.

(ID July 05)

TUC attacks long working hours and promotes LIFE-Work balance

The UK's long hours culture is damaging workers' personal lives and reinforcing the gender pay gap, trade union leaders said today. Ending the UK opt-out and limiting the working week to 48 hours is crucial if parents are going to be given a greater choice of how to balance their work and home life, according to the Trades Union Congress.

Long hours are forcing women to juggle paid work with looking after children and older relatives while their partners work the longest hours in Europe. In its submission to the government's consultation on flexible working, the TUC accuses UK bosses of being obsessed with the need to work long hours. It welcomed many of the new rights for parents that have been introduced, but said they are "merely a sticking plaster over a much bigger problem".

The best way for employees to achieve a better work-life balance would be to give everyone the right to work flexibly, it said.

This would mean allowing all carers and parents of children under 18 to ask their employers for changes in the way they work. And this could be supplemented with a change in the rules surrounding parental leave, so that the 13 weeks' unpaid leave parents are now allowed to take during the first five years of their child's life, could be taken at any time until a child reaches their teens.

Addressing the issue of leave for new parents, the TUC said mothers should receive 100% of earnings in the first six weeks of their maternity leave, as opposed to the current rate of 90%. This would boost household income and allow many mothers to extend their leave.

It also recommended the introduction of earnings-related paternity leave and increased flexibility on when the leave was taken. Currently fathers are allowed two weeks immediately following the birth, during which time they are paid £100 a

week. It argued that the low level of payment is putting fathers off exercising their right to leave.

A lack of childcare choice was restricting the options for parents and forcing many families into a "shift-parenting" system where both parents work but at different times leaving one at home to look after the children, the TUC said. It called for greater investment in childcare to increase the number of places available.

The organisation said although 80% of parents had had their requests for a change in the way they work agreed to by their employers, many experienced an increased workload or demotion as a result.

TUC called for a strengthening of the law so that employers can only turn down requests for flexible working if there is a genuine reason to do so and must put that reason in writing.

"The business benefits of flexible working are there for all to see," said the TUC's general secretary, Brendan Barber. "Apart from the obvious impact on the individual parent, who feels less stressed and more in control of their lives, more motivated employees are also more productive ones.

"Increasingly people are balancing the demands of caring not only for children but also dependent adults, and these workers need support and protection.

"But long hours working is the biggest demon facing UK workers. Many fathers find themselves spending extra hours at work when they would really rather be at home, which in turn forces their partners to reduce their hours and pay to run the home and look after children.

"A better work-life balance where men and women could spend more time with their families and be less stressed at work would be in everyone's interest."

Bullying in academia?

Petra Boynton (University College London) is asking you to support the research she's currently carrying out about experiences of bullying in academia.

This study is open to any academic or academic-related staff member working in a university within the UK or Northern Ireland. They may have been bullied or perhaps feel those who claim they've been bullied just can't handle academic life. Alternatively they may have views about bullying but no personal experience. The survey contains both open and closed ended questions and results will be used to improve staff well-being and increase good practice within academia.

To participate, please visit <http://www.thes.co.uk/bullying> .

Petra's using a snowball method so please pass this link on to anyone else you know who might be interested. If you have further questions feel free to contact Petra at p.boynton@pcps.ucl.ac.uk

BMA on offensive over sick notes

The BMA has written to Work and Pensions Secretary David Blunkett to express concerns about GPs assessing patients for incapacity benefit, ahead of a Government green paper being published in July.

The paper, from the Department for Work and Pensions, will outline the replacement of the current benefit and says GPs will be expected to advise patients about opportunities to stay in work and the harmful effects of unemployment.

Information and training for GPs will be provided on fitness for work and the 'detrimental impact of worklessness on patient health', and pilot studies will place employment advisers in GP surgeries.

A DWP spokesman said: 'GPs provide a vital role in providing advice to the patients regarding fitness for work. Wherever possible, early return to work should be encouraged as part of the patient's management.'

Dr Peter Holden, chairman of the BMA's professional fees committee, said he had written to Mr Blunkett about the damaging effects of the current system. 'The BMA will welcome the green paper as it will allow

proper examination of incapacity benefits,' he said.

Heart disease is a major killer

People in the north of the UK are still more likely to die from coronary heart disease than their southern counterparts. The British Heart Foundation's figures show the premature death rate from CHD increases the further north you go. The highest rate is in Scotland, then in north-east and north-west England and the lowest in south-west England.

Scottish men are 67% more likely than those in the south-west to die before age 75. The gap is not narrowing, despite efforts made in recent years to improve public health in those areas most in need

For women the comparison is even starker. Scottish women are a massive 84% more likely to die prematurely than their counterparts in the south west.

Wales is also a hotspot, with a higher death rate than the average for England. The figures are released in the same week that cancer statistics revealed a similar north-south divide.

Professor Peter Weissberg, BHF medical director, said: "The north-south divide in death rates has been a problem for decades and it is concerning that the gap is not narrowing, despite efforts made in recent years to improve public health in those areas most in need."

Biggest killer

The latest BHF statistics, compiled from 2003 death rates, show that the number of people dying from CHD is falling, but it remains the UK's single biggest killer, claiming nearly 114,000 lives that year. Nearly 27,700 men died prematurely from CHD in the UK in 2003. In the 10 years from 1994, the number of men living with CHD has increased from 6% to 7.4% of the adult population. In women the number has increased from 4.1% to 4.5%.

There are now an estimated 2.6m people in the UK facing life with heart disease.

Professor Weissberg said it was unclear why there was such a pronounced regional variation in death rates. "It is likely to be a combination of factors, such as lifestyle, social inequalities and healthcare provision," he said. "The good news is that most of the risk factors are potentially modifiable, which provides hope that these inequalities can be tackled."

Figures show that smoking rates are higher in Scotland, than in Wales or England.

People in Scotland and the north of England drink more than those in the south.

And people in southern England also eat more fruit and vegetables than elsewhere in the UK.

Government response

A Department of Health spokesperson said huge progress had been made since the launch of the National Service Framework for coronary heart disease in March 2000.

"The death rate from heart disease and stroke among under 75s has fallen by 27.1%, saving an estimated 100,000 lives since 1996.

"The statistics also show that there is more work to be done to further reduce the inequality gap between the best and the worst areas, and this is already under way.

"The gap between the worst-hit areas of the country and the rest of the country has been narrowing - a 22% reduction in the absolute gap since 1996."

An additional £500m has been allocated to 88 Primary Care Trusts in areas of high deprivation with high levels of premature death from CHD.

Hospital's remedy for staff who call in sick

Ward staff at Mayday Hospital call in sick an average of 17.23 days a year each, statistics have shown. But the number of days lost each year per staff member is only slightly above the national average of 16.8.

The figures come from a report published by The Healthcare Commission and are based on a survey covering 135,000 hospital ward staff in 6,000 hospital wards across the UK.

Mayday Healthcare NHS Trust said: "The rate of sickness among nursing staff is a national concern and the level of sickness absence at Mayday is in line with the national average.

"Work to reduce stress and sickness in the workplace, including recruitment initiatives, increased staff counselling services and a review of our sickness absence policy, is a priority for us in improving the working lives of all staff."

The Healthcare Commission report also shows what patients think about the care they received in hospital.

When compared with other nearby hospital trusts, including St George's in Tooting, Kingston General and St Helier in Carshalton, Mayday, in Thornton Heath, received the most complaints about nursing care.

Between October 2004, and March 2005, there were 26 complaints. A spokesman said: "This needs to be seen in context.

During the same period over 30,000 patients were admitted to our hospitals. We are not complacent and have launched a new attitude, behaviour and communication policy to ensure that all staff are aware of the minimum standards expected of us."

Nine-to-five in decline as UK embraces flexi-time

Flexible working, whether flexi-time, job sharing or working at home, has gained a firm foothold in British workplaces over the past seven years, says a government employment survey.

The demise of the traditional nine-to-five job is clearly signalled in the study, sponsored jointly by the Department for Trade and Industry and ACAS. It shows almost two-thirds of over 3,000 workplaces surveyed now have staff who have switched from full-time to part-time hours, compared with only 46% in 1998 when the survey was last conducted.

Diary Dates

- **Sept 12th Stress Network Steering Group Meeting** Hillscourt Centre Rednal
- **Sat 19th November 6th Stress Network Conference** Hillscourt Centre Rednal