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HR Software - A Better Approach to Absence Management Holds the Key

"Sick staff cost UK businesses an average of £692 a year, per employee. A typical organisation of 500 employees could save over £46,000 if they were able to reduce absenteeism by just one day per staff member. Absence management systems help you do that – and the options just got better!" argues Chris Berry, managing director of Computers in Personnel.

Just how big a problem is sickness absence to UK employers? Huge, judging by the findings of the latest annual Absence Management Survey from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. Released in July, the report shows that sickness absence costs employers on average £692 per employee every year – which equates to 7.4 working days for every member of staff annually, and represents an overall cost to the UK economy of £17.3 billion.



And cost isn't the only issue. Absence can have a big impact across every organisation, affecting everything from the quality of customer service to speed of product development – not to mention the impact on the morale of other employees, who are often expected to shoulder the burden of their colleagues' days off.

These points bring into sharp focus the need for systems to measure and monitor absence. If implementing a system could reduce absence by just one day per year per employee, a company of 500 staff would save over £46,000.

One big problem for many organisations is that absence is recorded haphazardly (or in some cases, not at all). It tends to be left to line managers, and it's often paper-based – as a result, data goes missing and it's hard to see the overall picture. But by recording absence electronically and monitoring it centrally, organisations immediately get better insight into what's happening and better control.

This means, for example, that you can identify extended absence much earlier and act accordingly. Software systems also make it easier to spot persistent abusers – like the people who regularly take a Friday off after going out on Thursday night. It's also easier to reduce the impact of each absence. Using workflows built into the absence management system, organisations can ensure that the right people are informed at the right time about someone falling ill so that measures can be taken to provide cover – something that often falls down when you rely on people calling the office and one of their colleagues taking a message.

Automating the collection of absence information also generates a central pool of data that you can start to analyse to identify longer-term trends, which is hard to do when the information is scattered about the company on paper forms or different spreadsheets. You might find, for example, that one department has a higher rate of absence than comparable departments, or that absence has shot up compared to the previous year. By digging a little deeper, you could uncover some important issues – it may be, for example, that you have a problem with a line manager that's affecting team morale. Tackling this kind of problem won't just reduce absence – it can also reduce employee turnover.

There are also some subtler benefits. Once they've started capturing data, organisations often display absence statistics through their employee self-service set-up or employee portal. That's quite a powerful incentive: when people can see that details of their time off are being captured and scrutinised, the level of absence tends to decline.

It's important to bear in mind that this isn't just about the employer – there are benefits for employees too. Whenever they need support – be it financial, medical, mental or spiritual – it can be initiated at a much earlier stage if absence is being effectively monitored.

At Computers in Personnel, we're taking absence management a step further by providing employers with a central voice based system that allows their employees to log absence at any time of the day or night. You can set the system up so that it alerts appropriate managers automatically, by email or SMS – and you can immediately trigger all the appropriate actions to manage the absence. From an employer's point of view, the system is also very cost-effective because we provide it as a 'hosted service'. This means that we manage the software for you – instead of paying a licence fee, installing the software and maintaining it on your own systems, you simply pay a monthly usage fee. It keeps the cost of entry and the ongoing cost per employee low and it means that you can get up and running with the system very quickly.

For those companies that aren't yet paying close attention to absence, this kind of service gives them the opportunity to introduce better absence management procedures right now. Recognising the scale of the problem is half the battle – now it's time to take steps to tackle it.

For more information, please visit www.computersinpersonnelhr.com

