Supporting staff moving from home to on-site working – top tips

Many of our staff have been working from home over the last 3 months in accordance with lockdown restrictions instigated to prevent the spread of COVID-19. As lockdown restrictions are relaxed, some of these staff are beginning to return to their normal place of work either on a full-time or part-time basis. We know via our health, wellbeing and psychological support networks that staff are experiencing mixed emotions about this. Some staff are feeling happy and relieved to be able to start returning to their normal work place and creating a separation between the home and work environment. However, there are some staff feeling anxious about returning having spent 3 months working from home. It’s important that we support our colleagues as they return to the work place and help them to readjust.

Here are some tips for line managers to consider when staff are returning to on-site working:

- Talk to your member of staff before they return about how they are feeling about it and what you can do to make the return to the work place as smooth as possible. Remember some will have not been out in public areas for a long time.

- Ensure the risk assessment form completed for each team member is reviewed. This will help tailor the conversation to each individual. Ensure a new risk reduction process is completed with each individual before they return to on-site working and agree any actions with them that need to be implemented to support their return.

- Consider requirements for social distancing. Do you need to make any changes to the working environment to enable social distancing?

- Is it necessary for all members of staff who have been working from home to return to the workplace at the same time. Can you create a rota, with some of your team working from home on some days whilst others are at the ‘workplace’, so that everyone gets a chance to come into the ‘workplace’ and work from home.

- Let staff know of any changes that have been implemented before they come back to the workplace e.g. the need to wear surgical masks, changes to desk and seating arrangements, availability of hand sanitisers, requirements to clean desk areas, changes to entry & exit points, introduction of one way systems, how to get an antibody test, availability of car/bike parking, availability of catering & rest facilities, toilet and kitchen areas, etc.

- Take some pictures of your new on-site work space and send them to staff who have been working from home so that they can visualise what the on-site work environment looks like before they return.

- Offer the opportunity to pop in for an hour or two, or even a full day, before they formally return to the work place to familiarise themselves with social distancing and infection control practices.
• A common worry for many staff is travelling to a work place, particularly during busy periods and if using public transport. Perhaps see if the first time a team members schedule a day to come in, they arrive mid-morning and leave mid-afternoon to avoid peak travel times. Consider whether you can create staggered start and finish times for the team to support individuals who are anxious about travelling during rush hour.

• Make individuals aware of the availability of health, wellbeing and psychological support services e.g. Talk Changes, First Steps as well as the resources available for staff on the intranet.

• Encourage supportive conversation with in your team. For example, create “buddies” pairing staff returning to on-site working with someone who is already site based or has recently returned.

• Find new ways to ensure all your team are involved in team meetings and events whether working on-site or from home. MS Teams is a great way to bring a team working in multiple locations together on a regular basis.

It is really important that all staff who are returning to on-site working undertake an updated risk reduction process with the line manager. If you are a member of staff who is thinking about returning to on-site working, please contact your line manager to undertake this process before returning.

Working from home & want to talk to others in the same position?
We are keen to offer staff who have been working from home the opportunity to connect with others who have been in the same position to share their experience of working from home and how they feel about returning to work. We can facilitate this by using TEAM TIME. It is a modified version of a Schwartz Round, and involves staff members talking about a situation and the impact it had on them. It is a safe and confidential setting which is facilitated by trained professionals. The session takes place on ZOOM and lasts 45 minutes. If you are interested in being involved email Hugh Grant-Peterkin (hugh.grant-peterkin@nhs.net) for more information.