

A case management occupational health model to facilitate earlier return to work of NHS staff with common mental health disorders: a feasibility study

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

Anxiety and depression are common causes of sickness absence in the NHS. This can harm patient care. Previous research has shown that offering early support to NHS staff on sick leave with a common mental health disorder is important to aid recovery and rehabilitation. However, it is not currently known how best to support staff in returning to work.

The purpose of this research was to test the feasibility of a large-scale study to see if specially trained occupational health nurses would be effective in getting NHS staff with these problems back to work quicker. We reviewed the recent scientific literature and did a survey of NHS occupational health departments to find out what was currently offered to such staff.

We developed a new work-focused case management intervention and trained six occupational health nurses to deliver it. We recruited 24 NHS staff who were on sick leave with a common mental health disorder (such as depression or anxiety) and allocated 11 to receive the new intervention and the rest to receive usual support. Participants were invited to complete three questionnaires and we collected information from the participating occupational health sites. We also interviewed participants, managers, human resource staff and occupational health nurses to find out what they thought about being involved in the study.

We found that the new case management intervention had potential benefits. However, it would not be possible to run a trial to evaluate the intervention until a better way can be found to encourage the early referral of sick staff to occupational health.

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This report

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