Long Covid or Burn Out?

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After 18 months of living through this pandemic, many of us are tired of it. Many people have long-term effects of fatigue from actually having contracted COVID-19, and many others are just physically and mentally affected from being through several lockdowns and living through a highly stressful and unusual experience for an extended period.

Many employees have been on furlough and stressed about reduced incomes and the security of their jobs. Other employees have been busier than ever, required to go into workplaces where they are at physical risk of catching COVID. Many people have been forced to work at home, isolating them from their colleagues, and maybe also requiring them to become part time teacher for their children as well as full time worker.

It's been exhausting all round and it might be starting to take a toll on employees.

Employers should, more than ever, be watching carefully for signs of "burnout" in their staff. Signs of this include emotional exhaustion, lack of energy and cynicism or detachment from work. Hopefully, with support, employees will recover from burn-out, but

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employers should be wary of the risk of not being understanding and patient with employees during this difficult time. Those with burn-out may fall as having a disability if there are underlying long term mental health issues, and employers should always be mindful of maintaining the relationship of trust and confidence with their staff.

Long-COVID can present similar symptoms to burn-out but requires a slightly different approach given we still know very little about Long-COVID. We cannot say at present, for example, how likely recovery is for any given person. As discussed in this article, employees with Long-COVID should be afforded patience and offered support to avoid legal claims.

Employers should be mindful of the issue of burn-out and ensure to offer employees a chance to talk (either with HR or any EAP service they offer), encourage employees to take proper breaks to disconnect from work and consider offering sessions like resilience training too.

Some companies have been doing really creative things to address the problem of burn-out, with Hootsuite, LinkedIn, Mozilla and Bumble each shutting down for a week to help reduce employee burnout. Other ideas, especially becoming well known in the US, include encouraging naps at work, no-meeting days and extending paid sick leave to include mental health and personal days.

We are fortunately in a much better place generally than at other stages of the pandemic, but COVID-19 isn't going anywhere, and employers need to learn to support employees as it continues to be part of our lives going forwards.

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