Impaired fitness for frontline work in police officers

Dr Joanne Tremlett, 2008

ABSTRACT

Objectives: This cross sectional study aims to examine the medical problems that lead to a reduced capacity for front line duties in a group of police officers, to assess the effect of ill health on operational strength and on individuals after returning to work and to evaluate the effect of other factors that may influence rehabilitation.

Method: Data was extracted from the occupational health records for a group of officers on modified duties. The type and duration of work modifications associated with underlying diagnosis was recorded together with data on organisational factors, number of health problems and level of treatment received.

Results: Musculoskeletal disorders were the most common cause of impaired fitness for frontline work. Constitutional problems were more common than mental health problems. Operational strength was reduced by about 8% and the mean time officers had spent away from full duties (work loss) was 16 months for officers with a good prognosis and over 4 years where the condition was unlikely to resolve. Duration of work loss was not significantly different according to gender, diagnostic category or work relatedness of cause but was increased with age and multiple health complaints. Managerial issues arose more frequently for officers with mental health conditions; officers restricted in the longer term had a greater chance of a change of role after the initial modification of duties. There was no evidence that medical management was inadequate; for 85% of the group an appropriate specialist had directed the medical treatment. However the results suggested that psychological support for those with chronic health problems might be improved.

Conclusion: Medical problems are a cause of reduction of operational strength for this organisation; chronic conditions can lead to prolonged inability to carry out core police tasks despite good conventional treatment. Some officers experience difficulties as a result of the impact of ill health including a change of role and management problems and may require extra support at these times.

MSc Abstract: Joanne Tremlett