



Helping a care assistant with shoulder pain to return to work

Kate is a 45 year old woman who previously worked in a care home for 17 years. She developed pain in her left shoulder, and required a rotator cuff repair. Kate's surgery and rehabilitation was successful and progressed as expected. However Kate was absent from work for 13 months and wanted to return to work.

The manager of the care home referred Kate to an occupational therapist to establish Kate's capabilities for a return to work. Kate had not sustained an injury at work, but her shoulder pain had developed over time. He was aware Kate wanted to return to work but still had some limitations.

During the functional assessment by the occupational therapist, Kate demonstrated some restricted movements, in her left shoulder, however she said she had little pain. Kate appeared to be guarding her left shoulder during the assessment, though she was unaware of this. The occupational therapist discussed fear-avoidance and the fear of re-injury which is common and a natural protective instinct. Kate stated she has learnt to problem solve most of her personal and domestic tasks and the only difficulty she has now is carrying heavy shopping, which her husband helps her with.

The occupational therapist discussed with Kate the tasks involved in her work duties. The majority were physical needing bilateral movements, which Kate would not be able to perform.

Kate was able to identify a role which she could perform within the care home, which would also be valuable for the clients. This identified role would include talking to clients as well as providing refreshments and newspapers to stimulate the clients, Kate also stated she could do some of the administrative tasks for the care home.

The occupational therapist's report stated that Kate would not be able to return to work in the role of care assistant but recommended a different role within the organisation which Kate would be able to achieve. Kate met with her manager and discussed the proposition; Kate's manager has taken her back on a 3 month trial to establish if the role is viable for Kate and the care home.

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