



## Supporting Julie back to work

### Employee's story:

Fit for Work supported Julie\* when she had to take time off work due to severe muscle pain, and gave her the confidence to speak to her employer about returning to work in a way that was manageable for her.

Name:	Julie
Age:	53
Job role:	Care home worker



Julie\*, aged 53, is a support worker in a small care home in Rhyl, Wales. The care home has six live-in patients and a staff of seven. Julie was referred to Fit for Work by her GP in April 2015 after suffering severe pains in her legs.

"I get a lot of pain when I'm sitting down or lying down, which makes sleeping impossible – I'm always up during the night. It's not so much the pain that's the problem, because when I'm moving around at work I don't feel it. It's the lack of sleep caused by the pain that's the real issue – care home work often involves very long shifts, and trying to do your job well for 12 hours straight when you've been up in pain all night is not an easy task."

Julie was off work for two weeks, and then returned briefly, but was referred to the Fit for Work service by her GP when she informed him that she would need four weeks off due to her ongoing health issues.

"My GP asked me if I would mind if someone from the Fit for Work service rang me at a convenient time to discuss my issues in more detail, which I agreed to. I wasn't sure whether it would be helpful or not but I trusted my GP to refer me to something which could help me return to work successfully.

"The woman from Fit for Work phoned me and I told her about the problems I was experiencing with lack of sleep combined with long shifts."

The telephone assessment worked well for Julie due to its holistic nature – she was able to talk about both social and health factors which were preventing her return to work.

"I told Fit for Work that I was also experiencing panic attacks due to the stress brought on by lack of sleep. The woman I spoke to was really helpful, and we worked together on my Return to Work Plan. She suggested that I speak to my employer about only working shorter shifts until I had recovered properly."

Julie had a meeting with her employer, armed with her Return to Work Plan, and spoke about her coming back to work. "I spoke to my line manager about the problems I'd been having and whether I could work shorter shifts. I had considered asking in the past but I didn't feel as though I could. Knowing that a Fit for Work health professional had recommended that shorter shifts were a sensible option for me gave me the courage to ask. I knew that if my manager had a problem with it, I could tell her that I'd been given the suggestion by Fit for Work – I even had the leaflets I'd been given in my bag!



Just speaking to someone on the phone and knowing that they had the expertise to back me up gave me the confidence I needed to speak to my employer and go back to work in a way that suited me."

Luckily my manager agreed to let me work shorter shifts, so I didn't need to show her the leaflets, but knowing I could if I needed to was a good confidence boost."

Julie has now returned to work at the care home, and is working shorter shifts, making work a lot more manageable. "So far, my return to work is going really well. If someone is having health issues preventing them working, I'd definitely recommend the Fit for Work service. Just speaking to someone on the phone and knowing that they had the expertise to back me up gave me the confidence I needed to speak to my employer and go back to work in a way that suited me."

**GP's story:**  
**Dr. Simon Dobson,**  
**Julie's\* GP at Clarence**  
**Medical Centre in Rhyl,**  
**was pleasantly surprised**  
**by how Fit for Work**  
**worked for Julie.**

"When I met with Julie\* and discussed her ongoing health issues and lack of sleep, I estimated that it would take her between six to eight weeks for her to get back to work. The fact that she's already been back for three weeks, after I referred her for a Fit for Work telephone assessment, is amazing.

"The good thing about the service is that it means I can refer patients like Julie to people who are experts in occupational health, which isn't something we are trained in as GPs.

"This helps patients get back to work quicker, and it also saves me so much time. I'd estimate that I would have had to have at least three further appointments with Julie if it wasn't for Fit for Work, so that I could try and help her manage her health issues and return to work simultaneously. They took over and managed the whole process and Julie is already back at work, which is testament to how helpful it can be.

"As well as saving me time, it also means that there is a better standard of care for the patient, because they are dealing with someone trained in occupational health, who can help them create a personalised plan to help them get back to work in a way that suits them. I'm hopeful that more GPs will start referring patients to Fit for Work – it means less time writing sick notes and more time focusing on patients' health."



There is a better standard of care for the patient, because they are dealing with someone trained in occupational health, who can help them create a personalised plan to help them get back to work in a way that suits them."

\*name has been changed

Further information including guidance and FAQs for patients on Fit for Work is also available at [gov.uk](http://gov.uk)



England and Wales  
[www.fitforwork.org](http://www.fitforwork.org)

Scotland  
[www.fitforworkscotland.scot](http://www.fitforworkscotland.scot)

England and Wales  
0800 032 6235 (English)  
0800 032 6233 (Cymraeg)

Scotland  
0800 019 2211