What is Good work?

The pandemic crisis has caused upheaval in all our lives, particularly in the world of work. Both employers and employees have been seriously affected.

Employees

For someone who has had a Covid-19 infection and is beginning to think about going back to work it is an anxious time. You may have taken them a long time recover and reach this point, after suffering from what is often called post-acute Covid syndrome (PACS). You may have difficulty getting back to work, or finding a job. You may have worries about contracting the virus again at work, or having too much demanded of you too soon. And the workforce you are re-joining may be demoralised through being over-stretched in your absence.

Employers

Employers have had to develop new ways of working to make the environment safe for workers and customers. At the same time, they have had to respond flexibly to the fact that many of their staff are off sick, sometimes for a long time. And of course, some businesses have been unable to survive.

'Good Work'

I am an occupational physician. I look after people's health at work, and try to prevent people getting sick through their work. It seems to me that this is a time to turn a difficult situation to our advantage. Employers and employees need one another. People need jobs and employers need people! We need to seize the moment, pull together and support one another. We must aspire to create a new world of employment where 'good work' is the norm.

According to new research from the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development in the UK, "Even before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, work was becoming worse for our health. This is the complete opposite of how it should be – work *can* and *should* have a positive impact on people's lives."

Not working is bad for our physical and mental health! On the other hand, although research shows that work is *generally* good for our health, for it to be so it needs to be 'good work'. **Good work** can help our physical and mental wellbeing. The health benefits of good work spread to our children, our families and our communities.

The chart below neatly summarises the differences between 'good' and 'bad work':

'Good work'	'Bad work'
Offers job security	You are worried you might lose your job
Pays enough	Poor pay (and hours)
Contact with other people	Difficulty getting on with your boss or co-workers.
Gives people a purpose + structure to the day	
Work-life balance Opportunity to progress	shift work, and especially rotating shift work, is bad for physical and mental health
Safe work environment	Unsafe physical work environment
Workload not too much or too little. Some control over your tasks	Overloaded with work, or not enough to do. Not much control over how you do it.

Getting people into 'good' work helps us all: families, communities and countries. 'Bad work' costs. It leads to injuries at work, illness, sickness absence and worklessness, homelessness and crime. Furthermore, up to one-third of jobs fail to lift families out of poverty and for some people, working in these jobs may be no better for their health than no job.

I hope we can all help to create 'good work' for as many of us as possible!

If you are looking for work or trying to return to work after Covid, I encourage you to work with your communities to support 'good jobs' and share work around. If you are an employer, I encourage you to be as flexible as you can because at the end of the day, we have all been impacted by this pandemic and need to support each other in an equal way.

In my next leaflet, I will talk about how an employee and employer can cooperate to help return to work after PACS.