

How much work is too much work? The case of an employee with comorbidities

Nirani Nithiraajah

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Accommodating Stressors & Workplace Injuries

Description about the organization:

Master Technology is an international distribution company that specializes in the circulation of information technology products and services. Master Technology represents numerous technology suppliers and carries different electronics. This company is based in Irvine, California, and has multiple operations around the world including Mississauga, Ontario. At this specific distribution center, approximately 250 employees are working in different departments within the facility including inventory tracking, receiving/storage, picking/packing, shipping, and reporting. Employees at this distribution center work eight-hour day or night shifts; a maximum of 40 hours per week are expected from the employees.

The receiving and storing department is composed of the 3 department managers, 4 supervisors, and 30 assembly line workers. Daily responsibilities of the assembly line workers include receiving inbound shipments and storing the shipments in their respective locations. In addition, assembly line workers are involved in the use of heavy machinery and quality control for the shipments being delivered.

Description of the incident:

Kevin Smith is employed as an assembly line worker at the Master Technology distribution center in Mississauga, Ontario. He has been employed as an assembly line worker for the past three years at Master Technology. Kevin is a 35-year-old man with a past medical history of vertigo, syncope, and hypertension. Throughout his time at Master Technology, his quality of life regarding his health status has decreased. Recently, his health challenges have started to affect his work performance and pose a risk to occupational safety.

Kevin's medical history of hypertension is a result of the increased workload and work stressors at Master Technology. In addition, his syncope and vertigo are episodic and unpredictable; usually, highly stressful situations and long periods of standing are precipitating events for his condition. Furthermore, the role of an assembly line worker and the responsibilities that follow this have started to cause Kevin to have severe back and shoulder pain; the repetitive motions of receiving and storing shipments have caused a strain on Kevin's physical health status. Due to these health challenges, he has been experiencing mental health issues including anxiety and burnout. Kevin depends on his coworkers and management to ensure that if he does have an episode during work, they will know how to help him. In addition, Kevin has had to

cancel multiple follow-up appointments for his health condition due to the inability to take time off; the department is severely understaffed and Kevin is unable to take time off for his appointments. Due to this, his health condition has become worse, causing further exacerbations of his disease.

Kevin's coworkers and management team have started to express their concerns about his job performance and health conditions. Specifically, his manager, Shonda, has noticed a decline in his condition in the last month. Although Shonda knows that Kevin is a hardworking employee and friendly employee, his health conditions have started to affect the quality of work he produces. For example, in the past month, Kevin has experienced three syncope episodes where he has lost consciousness and the management team have had to call an ambulance. Furthermore, during these incidents, Kevin destroyed numerous electronics, which resulted in a loss of profit for the department. From Shonda's perspective, she understands that Kevin's health condition is not something he can control. Shonda also knows that firing him is not an option because Kevin needs this position to provide financial stability for his family.

Following his accidents this past month, Shonda has continued to ask him about his feelings and health status. However, Kevin has been isolating himself and refuses to share information regarding his challenges. This presents an obstacle for Shonda due to Kevin's inability to express the difficulty he is experiencing with the workload and the exacerbations of his health conditions. Without being aware of the challenges Kevin is facing, Shonda is unsure of how she can help improve his job performance while maintaining his health status at an optimal level.

Discussion Questions:

1. How can Shonda approach this issue with Kevin?
2. What are some of the barriers Kevin is facing and how are these factors affecting his work performance? How can Shonda help Kevin overcome these challenges?
3. What disability services or programs could Master Technology offer to employees like Kevin?
4. What changes can be made to Kevin's work conditions that could improve his health condition?
5. How can Shonda address both the lack of job performance from Kevin and accommodate his needs?

Appendices

Interview Questions

1. What does your organization do?
2. What does your specific unit do?
3. How big would you say the facility is? How many employees does the facility have?
4. What does a routine day look like?
5. What is an important health and safety challenge for the company and for you?
 - a. Why is this a problem?
 - b. Why can't it be resolved?
 - c. What are the management's concerns?
 - d. What are the employees' concerns?
6. Can you please share a specific incident when this problem was presented?
 - a. What action was taken?
 - b. What were the results?