Preamble

Over the course of the past year, when discussing accommodation in the workplace with employers, the most frequently identified areas of challenge were workload management and/or unpredictable absenteeism. We have been asked to provide additional information about job accommodation as well as some successful accommodation examples.

The following information is not exhaustive. There may be some examples provided herein that can be used by different organizations. However, job accommodation must be handled on a case-by-case basis in order to respond to the unique circumstances and needs of the specific individual and the employer.

It is important to note that it should not be assumed that because an individual has a disability or limitation(s) that they will require accommodation(s) in the workplace. An individual may have a disability that does not necessarily limit their ability to perform job functions. Individuals with disabilities may need no accommodations, a few, or many. When discussing HIV/AIDS and job accommodation, the overriding requirement that was identified by individuals was flexibility in work hours.

In practical terms, providing accommodation means considering various options in order to assist another person in meeting their needs and goals in the workplace without compromising the needs and goals of the employer.

Job accommodation can take different shapes and may respond to a range of requirements.

Some Examples of Accommodation Solutions

The Job Accommodation Network: http://www.jan.wvu.edu/media/HIV/html has a variety of accommodation options and solutions listed for different disabilities. The fact sheets provide information about the disability, some of the medical symptoms that may be experienced, some of the possible job limitations that may result and various job accommodation solutions.

The following is reproduced with permission from the Job Accommodation Network for HIV/AIDS and the workplace.

Managing Weight Loss

- Provide ergonomic chair with extra padding, arm supports
- Provide access to refrigerator to store food supplements and/or medications

Activities of Daily Living

- Move workstation closer to the restroom
- Allow longer breaks
- Refer to appropriate community services

10. Examples of Successful Job Accommodation

This is one in a series of information sheets addressing HIV/AIDS as an episodic disability in the workplace.

1. Benchmarking Organizational Policy Development and Implementation
2. A Rights Based Approach to Workplace Policy Development
3. HIV/AIDS and Human Rights in the Workplace
4. Discriminatory Business Practices
5. Privacy Protection in the Workplace
6. Employment Standards in the Workplace
7. Case Study
8. Practical Steps for Implementing Policies and Procedures
9. HIV/AIDS and the Duty to Accommodate

10. Examples of Successful Job Accommodation

11. How to Use the Policy Template Package
12. Policy Template
13. Frequently Asked Questions
Vision Impairment (reading information from computer screen)

- Provide equipment such as external screen magnifier, screen magnification software, larger sized monitor, anti-glare or anti-radiation screen guard, special computer glasses to reduce glare, and high resolution monitor
- Change font size or contrast in existing software application
- Frequent breaks to rest eyes when fatigue is a factor
- Additional training as may be required

Vision Impairment (reading information from paper copy)

- Provide equipment such as hand/stand magnifier, improved lighting or task lighting, optical wear such as eye glasses, low vision enhancement systems, flip-down magnifiers, etc.
- Reduce glare on paper copy (install/close blinds on windows, change lighting in area)
- Enlarge information on photo copier
- Implement frequent breaks to rest eyes when fatigue is a factor
- Additional training as may be required

Photosensitivity

- Provide lower wattage overhead lights, task lighting, broad spectrum lighting, flicker free lighting
- Move work station to another area
- Place blinds on windows

Fatigue/Weakness

- Reduce or eliminate physical exertion and workplace stress
- Schedule periodic rest breaks away from the workstation
- Allow a flexible work schedule and flexible use of leave time
- Allow work from home
- Implement ergonomic workstation design
- Provide a mobility aid if walking cannot be reduced

Stress

- Identify stressors and reduce stress
- Offer peer counseling, EAP, an open door policy to the supervisor
- Provide time off for counseling and/or other supports

Cognitive Impairment

- Provide more structure and/or written job instructions when possible
- Prioritize job assignments
- Allow flexible work hours
- Allow periodic rest breaks to reorient
- Provide memory aids such as schedulers or organizers
- Minimize distractions
- Allow a self-paced workload
- Reduce job stress

Respiratory Impairment

- Provide good ventilation
- Provide a clean work environment
- Avoid temperature extremes

Skin Infections

- Avoid infectious agents and chemicals
Some Considerations and Solutions

1. Is it Necessary to Modify the Job? For example: Job description, duties, work schedule and/or work location.

Situation: An employee has difficulty getting up in the morning as a result of their medication. Solution: The employee's working hours were changed to allow the employee to travel to and from work during the off hours of the day. Her lunch hour was modified from one hour to half-hour and she was able to arrive at work at 10:00 a.m. and leave at 5:30 p.m.

Situation: An employee was finding it increasingly difficult to get to work due to the fatigue associated with preparing for the day and driving to work. Solution: The employee was provided with a revised work arrangement that allowed regular working from home two days a week.

Situation: An administrative assistant could only go to the clinic during work hours. Solution: The employer provided the employee with a flexible work schedule, so that she could go to the clinic for medical attention and counseling. The employee made up the hours throughout the week by staying later and by coming in early.

Situation: An employee was having difficulty scheduling routine visits to his physician. Solution: The employee was provided regular time off each week so the employee could make arrangements to see his physician regularly and work at home for the remainder of the day.

Note: Other options include part-time work and/or job-sharing, working with volunteers or interns to assist the employee.

2. Is it Necessary to Modify a Policy? For example: Formalize policy changes, notify employees, policy implementation.

Situation: An employee needs to eat regularly to control the side effects of medication and to ensure optimal energy throughout the day. The employee handbook prohibits eating and drinking at the workstation. Solution: The workplace policy regarding food and drink was modified to allow the employee to have the necessary food/drink items at their workstation.

Situation: An employee was hypersensitive to fragrances in the workplace. The employee experiences severe headaches, difficulty breathing and is unable to perform job duties when exposed to fragrances. Solution: A policy was developed to address this, requesting employees to refrain from wearing or using fragrances in the workplace. Implementation of such a policy should also provide information to employees about the effects of fragrances on individuals who are hypersensitive to chemicals and fragranced products.

3. Is it necessary to use a product, purchase a piece of furniture or equipment?

Many products exist that could be used as an accommodation for an employee with a disability. Common terms used to refer to such products are assistive technology, ergonomic and/or independent living aids. Some products may be specifically designed for people with disabilities while others are not but may serve as an effective accommodation (for example an ergonomic chair).

It is important to note that if a product is purchased as an accommodation, the employer should consider compatibility issues, computer requirements, training, maintenance and the availability of technical support for the product.

Situation: An administrative secretary was experiencing visual difficulties. She was no longer benefiting from increasing the font on her computer to view and edit documents. Solution: The employer purchased screen magnification software. The software enhanced or enlarged all applications on the computer and allowed the employee to choose the amount of magnification and change color contrasts to fit her individual needs.
Situation: A bank teller was having difficulties standing for eight hours a day on a tile floor. Solution: The work area was carpeted using extra padding, which assisted in reducing fatigue, and a sit/stand/lean stool was purchased to assist the employee when standing. The employee was also permitted to take frequent rest breaks throughout the day. This was possible since the employee cut his lunch hour down to 30 minutes providing him with 30 minutes that could be used at other times of the day whenever a break was needed. Another teller was available to cover his breaks.

Note: This solution can benefit any other occupations where standing for long periods of time is problematic (food processing plants, manufacturing, retail, service industry etc).

Situation: An accountant was experiencing eye sensitivity to fluorescent light in her office. As a result, she was unable to clearly view her computer screen or written materials due to glare. Solution: The wattage in the overhead lights was lowered, task lighting was provided and a computer screen glare guard was installed.

Situation: A machine operator was experiencing difficulties remembering the steps involved in changing a part on his machine. Solution: The employer provided the employee with a step-by-step checklist and directions explaining how to do this.

4. Is it Necessary to Consult with other Resources?

Over the course of the accommodation assessment you may find it helpful to consult with an outside expert. This expertise may include the following:

- Ergonomic assessment
- Technology/Worksite evaluation
- Occupational/Rehabilitation Therapist
- Other as required

5. Explore Alternative Placement Options

The road to a successful accommodation may have challenges. Various roadblocks may lead an employer to the conclusion that accommodation in the original position may not be possible. While it is traditional to accommodate an employee in their original position, an employer should consider whether an alternative placement option could be the effective accommodation solution.

Some Questions to Consider When Exploring Alternative Placement Options:

- Is reassignment a possibility?
- Is the employee qualified for reassignment?
- Are there any vacant, equivalent positions available?
- If reassigned, will the employee have an equal opportunity to interact with co-workers and benefit from advancement in the new position as any other employee would?

If reassignment is the effective accommodation solution, identify an appropriate position and transfer the employee. Consider any reasonable accommodation needs the employee may have in the new position.

For further Canadian based resources about job accommodation solutions, please contact your local human rights office or search "job accommodation solutions in Canada".