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# HM

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Indepth

## Workplace health

How will consumerisation affect corporate occupational health?

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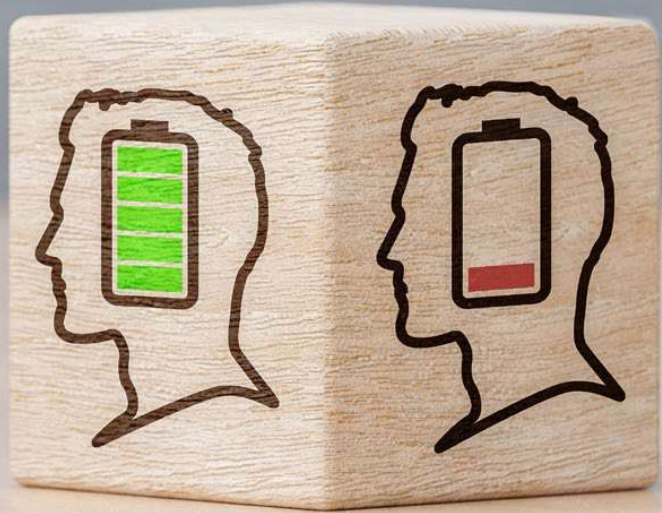
Workplaces can fundamentally shift the way we care for ourselves, with emerging opportunities for investors to consolidate proactive care that focuses on reducing employee absenteeism and increasing their 'healthspan'.

**Dr Michelle Tempest**, senior partner at Candestic, takes a candid look at how consumerisation will impact corporate occupational health and employee wellness in 2025 and beyond



# Workplace health

## the convergence of corporates and consumers



**C**ompanies across the world are reporting a drop in productivity and an increase in absenteeism. Wall Street banks believe remote working is a cause. Goldman Sachs mandated workers return to the office full-time post pandemic. This month, JP Morgan management announced its belief that face-to-face working improves productivity and removed any option of hybrid working. Many employers believe flexibility in the workplace improves employee's mental health. However, remote versus office working may not have much impact on employee wellness.

To give a few facts:

- By 2026, corporate wellness programmes are set to exceed £80bn globally
- Over 85% of USA and UK companies have workplace wellness schemes
- Despite money being spent on both physical and mental health management, ailments are increasing

In a survey of 1,274 American companies, more than 70% of staff said they did not access employee assistant programmes. Researchers at Oxford University spoke with over 46,336 workers and found a lack of employee buy-in, low leadership engagement and little evidence of the use of health tracking data. Yet poor employee wellbeing does correlate with a drop financial performance, so staff wellness is more than just ethics, it impacts the bottom line.

One thought-provoking theory from Simon Sinek, author of *Start with Why*, is that historically, people lived in communities with local friends – doing everything from going bowling to shared meals. However, Sinek flags that modern workplaces are expected to be the new social neighbourhoods with employees expecting them to provide emotional support and offer a sense of purpose. If he is right, it could explain a 2022 survey of global workforce, where 80% of people reported multiple psychosocial concerns, with some employees purporting that wellness apps were mere 'care-washing' for big brands.

### Longevity - joining up physical, mental health and wellness

There is evidence that staff should be the number one concern for all companies. Reminiscent of the famous Richard Branson quote 'Clients do not come first. Employees come first. If you take care of your employees, they will take care of the clients'. In our more digital age, there has never been a more important time to care for human staff.

The opportunity is to develop a far more joined up care coordinated marketplace of services. After all, a strong recruitment and retention driver is to foster longevity – a relatively new discipline in health and wellness – and encourage people to stay well beyond the traditional retirement age. In business terms, there is a wide-open investment opportunity for private equity to combine fragmented operators and combine them into a full care spectrum offering.

This new marketplace would coalesce towards the modern-day longevity market, which includes many sectors, such as:

- Employee assessment programmes
- Psychological Support
- Physiotherapy/MSK
- Nutritional support
- Primary care
- Blood, screening and diagnostic checks
- Occupational health
- De-addiction support
- Weight loss aids
- Digital Therapeutics
- Plus, more specialist offers such as menopause care, fertility and chronic conditions

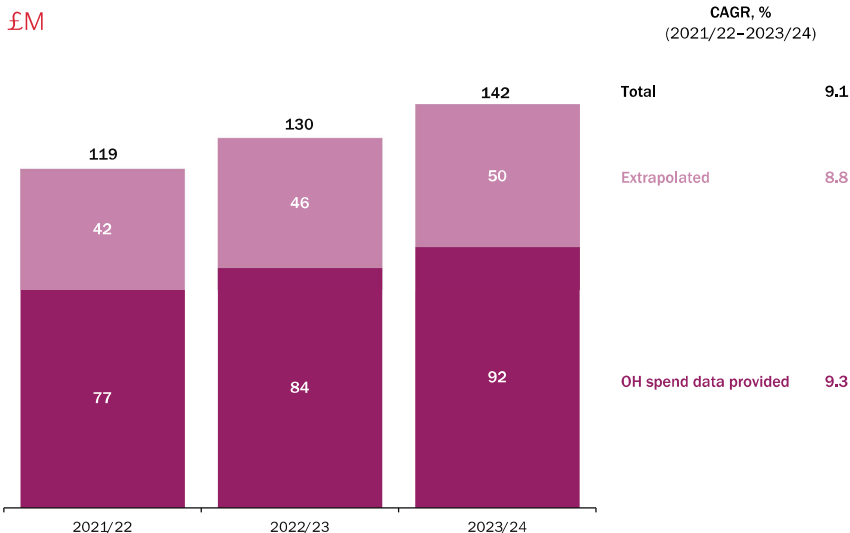
Many people will have seen the recent Netflix documentary *Don't Die: The Man Who Wants to Live Forever* (January 2025). Here, wealthy entrepreneur Bryan Johnson puts his body and fortune on the line to defy aging and extend his healthy life beyond all known limits. There is already a hunger among employees in Silicon Valley for longevity to be democratised and for employers to talk more about 'healthspans' – the number of healthy years in our lives. Life expectancy has doubled over the last 150 years and a new industry is emerging that is promising techniques and supplements to lead to healthier, longer lives. As most people spend over a third of their lives at work, it makes sense for the longevity corporate businesses to grow. This also means that deals, investment and growth are expected across the spectrum of operators, including those such as Koa, Bluecrest, Hinge Health, Onebright, 3 Peaks Health and many more that all do something different in the space.

## Occupational health case study

To get some data on the current state of play in occupational health, Candestic did a deep dive to better understand the offering of the NHS – the fifth largest employer in the world. The NHS ranks

### FIGURE ONE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SPEND IS GROWING ABOVE INFLATION AND HAS REACHED c.£142M ACROSS ALL TRUSTS

#### OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SPENDING BY NHS TRUSTS



SOURCE CANDESIC FOI OF NHS TRUSTS; CANDESIC MODEL; CANDESIC RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

after the US Department of Defence, China's People Liberation Army, Walmart and McDonald's – making it Europe's largest employer. To date, it remains very traditional in the way it supports over 1.3 million staff – many of whom are expected to do weekend work and night shifts.

As a direct result of these rota systems, staff are increasingly at risk of:

- Reduced performance (secondary to sleep deprivation)
- Obesity
- MSK injury
- Chronic diseases

Candestic undertook a Freedom of Information request across hospitals and community NHS trusts in England to better understand the evolution of the market. Almost 70% of NHS trusts returned data and that was extrapolated to all trusts according to staff numbers. Figure one reveals that over £140m is spent on occupational health – which includes vaccinations and a focus on maintaining and promoting employees' physical and social wellbeing by preventing work-related illnesses and injuries.

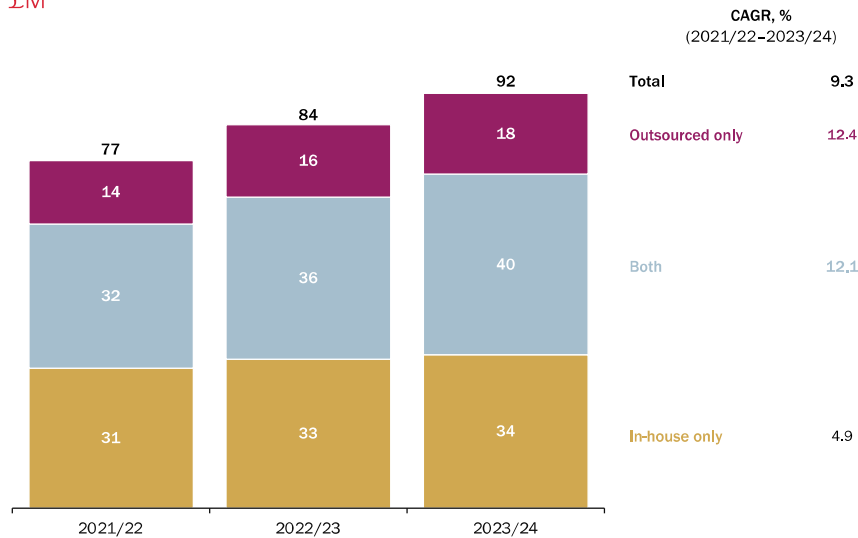
Figure Two shows that the NHS use a combination of in-house and outsourced occupational health operators and Figure Three highlights that 80% of

the budget is spent on physical health. There is also a trend to start outsourcing the mental health support to third party operators, which makes sense as many offer evidence based online self-help and psychological support.

It is likely that the budget to care for carers will have to increase. According to a 2024 NHS staff survey, 30% of employees often or always feel emotionally exhausted and burnt out due to work. Burnout, stress, anxiety and depression have become increasingly common among healthcare professionals, with poor mental health the leading cause of sickness absence in the NHS. The cost of staff absenteeism is compounded as healthcare is a notoriously high-pressure field where decisions often carry life-or-death consequences. Long shifts, staff shortages, and limited resources compound these pressures. The emotional burden of caring for patients, especially in cases with poor outcomes, frequently leads to compassion fatigue. Many healthcare professionals find themselves physically and emotionally drained, unable to decompress. Suicide rates among healthcare professionals remain disproportionately high compared to the general population, according to recent Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures. Female nurses, for example, experience suicide rates 25–26% higher than the national average for women. In response to this crisis, charities such

**FIGURE TWO**  
**THE MAJORITY OF TRUSTS USE A COMBINATION OF IN-HOUSE AND**  
**OUTSOURCED PROVISION AND THERE IS A SHIFT TOWARDS OUTSOURCING**

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SPENDING BY IN-HOUSE VS OUTSOURCED  
 £M



**NOTE** THIS INCLUDES FIGURES ONLY FOR THE TRUSTS WHICH PROVIDED DATA  
**SOURCE** CANDESIC FOI OF NHS TRUSTS; CANDESIC MODEL; CANDESIC RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

as Doctors in Distress have stepped in, offering targeted mental health resources for healthcare workers.

### Three big future shifts to reduce absenteeism

**Rise of integrated trackables:** It's likely that employees will want to integrate their biometric data, from wearables such as Oura rings, whoop, fitbits etc. Corporates are much more likely to have positive impact when proactive care can be personalised easily by knowing things such as heart rate variability (HRV) and sleep quality.

**Workplace triage:** As population health becomes ever more sophisticated, employers may triage their workforce. Companies such as HN Navigator already offer physical health triage and Psymics for mental health. It's likely that working age people will want the option to be triaged – especially when offers to predict and prevent heart attacks become more mainstream.

**Weight management:** With the meteoric rise in GLP-1s and the weight loss medication craze, it's likely that medication, exercise and nutrition platforms

will be offered direct in the workplace. In January 2025, Professor Naveed Sattar, who leads the UK government's Obesity Healthcare Goals programme, said if all those eligible were given the drug 'it would simply bankrupt the NHS'. As the NHS is likely to be very slow to adopt obesity and weight loss services at scale, corporates have an opportunity to fill the gap.

Susannah Basile, CEO of Doctors in Distress said 'The Winter Crisis has further exacerbated the need for comprehensive mental health support for all healthcare workers. Corridor care has become the norm with healthcare workers working in a system that is not fit for purpose.

'It is imperative we remember that healthcare workers are human, they too have mental health and understandably can struggle with the emotional impact of their work. The evidence from this research shows that only 20% of Occupational Health spending is invested in mental health. Now is the time to redress that balance and invest in easily accessible mental health support to the NHS and its staff.'

## Opportunities for innovation and improvement

The workplace longevity, occupational health and wellbeing landscape presents numerous opportunities for growth and innovation. Examples include:

- 1. Leadership advocacy:** Leadership plays a critical role in breaking down barriers to engagement. A recent global survey by the MindForward Alliance found that employees are significantly more likely to use wellness tools and support systems when leadership actively discusses and prioritises mental health. Transparent communication fosters trust and normalises seeking help.
- 2. Tech-driven solutions available in and out of the workplace:** The meteoric rise of wellness apps, exercise apps, physiotherapy platforms and talking therapy platforms offer an accessible, cost-effective way to support health. Some employees would like more seamless and joined up solutions rather than having to log in and out of different systems.
- 3. Awareness and feedback campaigns:** Increasing employee awareness of available resources can significantly boost engagement. Targeted communication and training can demystify these services, highlight their value, and provide a better return on investment.
- 4. Proactive health initiatives:** Prevention-focused programmes, such as resilience training, mindfulness workshops and even time management courses, can reduce the incidence of mental health issues, empowering employees to manage stress before it escalates. The same goes for nutritional education and cycle to work schemes.
- 5. Hybrid and holistic systems:** The future has to be in more integrated wellness, physical and mental health

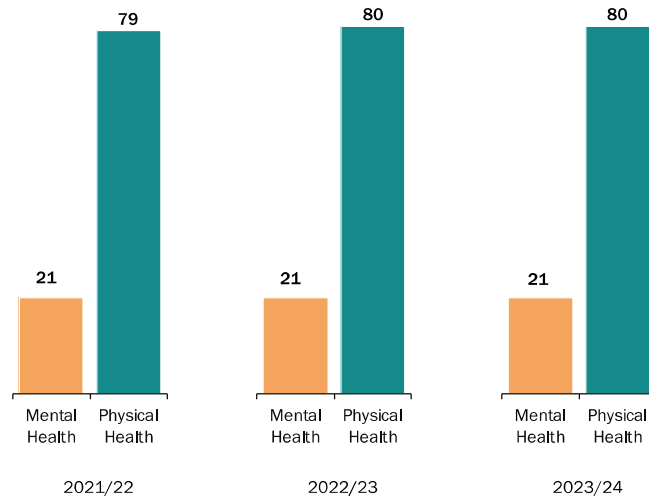
solutions, which are proactive and personalised.

**6. Build accountability and global standards:** Perhaps the most powerful shift which is yet to take place is the need to systematically assess outcomes and adhere to metrics that matter.

In conclusion, Candestic has reviewed the broad spectrum of what is needed to future proof employee wellness across corporate and consumer settings. The market is set to consolidate across disciplines, specialties and countries and there will be some big winners. However, for investors to buy and build, they will need to embrace innovation and ensure that the sales talk is more than 'care-washing'.

**FIGURE THREE  
PHYSICAL HEALTH ACCOUNTS FOR THE MAJORITY OF OH SPEND (80%)  
COMPARED TO MENTAL HEALTH**

**MENTAL HEALTH VS PHYSICAL HEALTH OH SPENDING  
% OF TOTAL SPENDING ON OH IN TRUSTS THAT PROVIDED DATA**



**SOURCE** CANDESTIC FOI OF NHS TRUSTS; CANDESTIC MODEL; CANDESTIC RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

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