

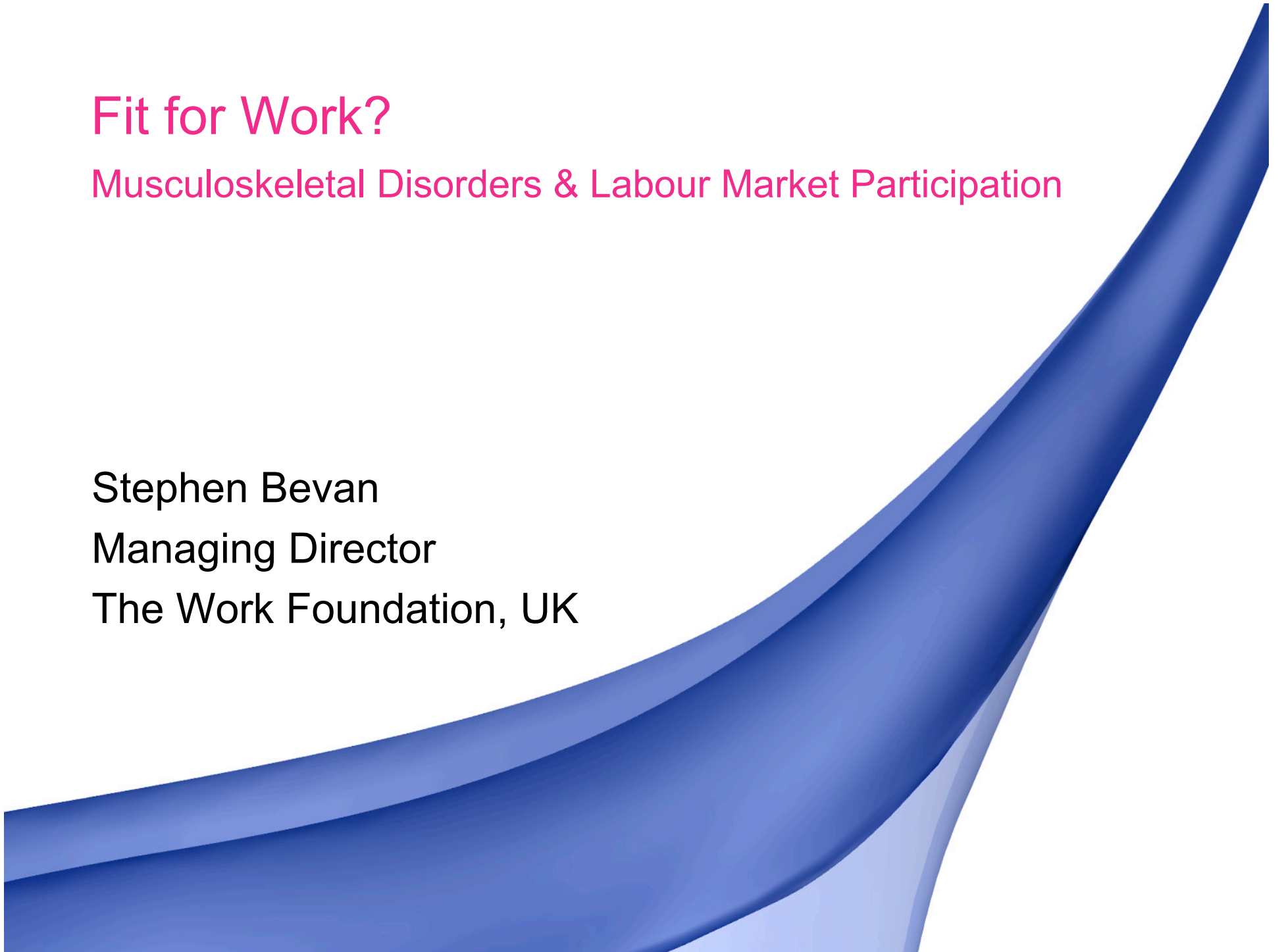
the work foundation



# Fit for Work?

Musculoskeletal Disorders & Labour Market Participation

Stephen Bevan  
Managing Director  
The Work Foundation, UK



# Healthy Workers?

- Over 16% of EU workers have a long-standing, work-limiting, health condition
- Over 40% of Swiss workers claiming invalidity benefits report Mental Health issues
- Most absences from work in Switzerland are still caused by musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) – at a cost – of up to 4 billion CHF each year
- In Switzerland MSDs constitute one third of all the consultations with family doctors
- High levels of work incapacity have economic & social consequences – and inhibit competitiveness

the work foundation



## MSDs in the EU

- 100m people in the EU suffer from chronic musculoskeletal pain
- MSDs account for 50 per cent of all work-related disorders & 60 per cent of permanent work incapacity in the EU
- Almost 50 per cent of all absences from work of 3 days or more are caused by MSDs
- Represents up to 3.8 per cent of EU economic output
- Fit for Work study examining MSDs in 25 countries (including CH)

## 'Fit for Work?' Study Themes

- Importance of early diagnosis, intervention, treatment & rehabilitation – keeping in work is crucial
- Focus on capacity *not* incapacity
- Patients can be Workers too
- (Good) Work is good for health – job retention & supportive rehabilitation work for most people when job demands are adjusted – requires skilled intervention at work
- Successful Return to Work is a legitimate clinical outcome



## Early Intervention – Back Pain

- Most people get better quickly
- Focused interventions can improve return to work significantly
- Not just a medical issue – there is a strong ‘psycho-social’ dimension
- Degree of work-disability and speed of return to work is strongly linked to mental health and job satisfaction
- Suggests that ‘biopsychosocial’ approaches for MSDs can deliver best results



the work foundation

## Irish Example – Diagnostic Triage – Back Pain

- 600 early referral Back Pain claimants offered ‘triage’ intervention (including Physio & CBT) to improve ‘workability’
- Percentage subsequently assessed as fit for work grew from 20% in the year before the intervention to 64% post-intervention
- 40 per cent reduction in progression to long-term incapacity
- Saving of 560,000 euros compared with previous year



the work foundation

## Key Issues

- MSDs are economically & socially important
- Becoming 'detached' from the labour market with an MSD can be difficult & costly
- Early interventions are available and are often cost-effective – requires access to good OH advice
- (Good) Work is, for the majority, good for health
- Need to focus on capacity – not incapacity – The UK 'Fit Note' scheme should be considered
- Government, employers & clinicians can all play a part in improving worker health & Fitness for Work

the work foundation



[www.theworkfoundation.com](http://www.theworkfoundation.com)

[www.fitforworkeurope.eu](http://www.fitforworkeurope.eu)



the work foundation

the work foundation

