

Early Reporting of a Workers' Compensation Claim and Transitional Work

By Careworks,
the recommended workers' compensation medical care organization
for members of the Ohio Library Council

Early reporting of a workers' compensation claim is important in controlling costs. The longer it takes to report a claim, the more costly the claim becomes. That's why CareWorks educates its clients on the importance of reporting claims through our online First Report of Injury (FROI) system. If done at the time of an injury, the notice is automatically sent to the assigned case manager, initiating our triage process. The case manager evaluates the medical information, determines injury severity and begins facilitating an appropriate treatment and return to work plan. The FROI and corresponding medical information is imaged into our system, eliminating any delays associated with the routing of paperwork. This is a key first step in managing new claims and promoting optimum outcomes.

The second step is to develop a plan to bring the injured worker back to work through transitional duties. Transitional duties enable the injured employee to perform valuable work during their recovery as opposed to staying home from work. The transition initiates a number of physical and mental advantages for both the employee and the employer. Work is rehabilitative. If the worker can perform these transitional duties, they are more likely to attain a full return to work.

Transitional work has several benefits. First, the employee remains active and productive, which helps prevent loss of physical fitness and muscle tone due to inactivity. Second, the employee can earn full or partial wages during transition, which brings income closer to pre-injury wages, which can alleviate concerns about continued employment. Third, getting the employee back to their day-to-day routine reduces disruption to their life, and provides the employee contact and support from co-workers and friends. Finally, the retention of this experienced staff member in the workforce helps the employer eliminate unnecessary expenses associated with hiring and training new or temporary employees.

These advantages are in defense of the widely-accepted theory that the longer an injured worker is off work, the harder it is for him/her to safely return.

Q. Should an injured employee stay home to recover?

A. Today, the strategy of having an employee work only when fully recovered can be considered "old school thinking." Recent national studies report that work is generally good for health and well-being and not working is generally bad.

While employers often focus primarily on physical recovery, the time an injured employee spends away from their career and peers can be just as traumatic as the injury itself.

Often times an injured employee may be limited in what tasks they can perform when they first return based on work restrictions prescribed by their healthcare provider. However, today's occupational health providers are more receptive to work with employers and focus on an injured employee's abilities as opposed to their disabilities. These providers share the same goal of returning an injured employee to productivity as soon as medically possible because of the positive impact work can have on achieving a healthy long-term recovery.

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Q. What if I don't have the time or the budget to develop an early return to work program?

A. The truth is many employers do not have time or budgetary resources to afford even one lost time claim. Transitional and alternative duty programs are designed to give employers the tools they need to eliminate the occurrence of costly lost time claims.

Creating optimum outcomes of occupational claims does not occur through happenstance. Implementing early reporting procedures and a transitional duty process will result in your injured employees returning to a healthy and productive lifestyle as quickly as possible. The outcome of such steps include improved employee morale, a healthier workforce and a financially stronger organization.

CareWorks is helping injured workers throughout Ohio recover from workplace injuries and return to work as quickly and safely as possible. Effective medical management helps our employer customers develop strategic return to work programs that reduces lost time. CareWorks' efficient strategies promote the healthy and timely recovery of injured workers and help control workers' compensation costs for over 160,000 CareWorks customers.

For more information about this article or about CareWorks, please call Ron Lucki, Director of Business Development at 888-627-7586, ext 3510.