

Return-to-Work Employer-Physician Partnership

The Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board's (WCB) goal is to help an injured worker recover and resume normal life activities as soon as it is medically safe to do so. This requires a working partnership between the worker, health care practitioner, employer and the WCB. The following information relates specifically to the employer-physician partnership.

Canadian Medical Association

The Canadian Medical Association (CMA) recognizes the importance that RTW can play in the health, well-being and recovery of injured workers. It states:

Prolonged absence from one's normal roles, including absence from the workplace, is detrimental to a person's mental, physical and social well-being. The treating physician should therefore encourage a patient's return to function and work as soon as possible after an illness or injury, provided that return to work does not endanger the patient, his or her coworkers or society. A safe and timely return to work does not endanger the patient, his or her coworkers or society. . A safe and timely return to work benefits the patient/employee and his or her family by enhancing recovery and reducing disability. A safe and timely return to work by the employee also preserves a skilled and

stable workforce for employers and society and reduces demands on health and social services as well as on disability plans.

CMA policy document: The treating physician's role in helping patients return to work after an illness or injury (update 2013).

In addition, the Canadian Medical Association has outlined its position on how they view the employer's role in the RTW process. In particular, the CMA outlines the importance of a supportive workplace culture, an employer's flexibility in providing alternate and modified work and good employer-employee communication.

The policy states that:

The Role of the Employer

The employee and the employer generally have an established relationship and this is central to the return-to-work process. In all cases of impairment or disability, an unbiased workplace supervisor, manager or employer representative must be closely involved in the process.

Employers increasingly recognize the value of making changes to the workplace than [sic] can facilitate a return to work. The employer's role is to ensure that the workplace culture supports a safe and timely return to work; for example, by being flexible in modifying tasks, schedules and

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environmental conditions to meet the temporary or permanent needs of the employee.

Employees are often unaware of their employer's capacity to accommodate special needs. Direct communication by an employee with his or her employer after an illness or injury often enhances the employee's perception of his or her ability to work. With careful planning and appropriate physician input and advice to both the employee and the employer, an employee may often successfully return to work before full recovery... ..

... Ultimately, the employer determines the type of work available and whether a physician's recommendations concerning an employee's return to work can be accommodated.

CMA policy document: PD01-09 Name of Policy: The Treating Physician's role in helping patients return to work after an illness or injury (update 2013).

The position paper outlines a variety of different roles health care providers may play in RTW and guidelines to follow that can change depending upon the degree they are assisting in developing and overseeing an individual patient's RTW plan.

College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan Medical Association - Joint Position Paper

In spring 2006, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan, along with the

Saskatchewan Medical Association, developed a joint policy to provide guidance to physicians on their role of providing medical certification of illness or injury and/or assessing capacity for work.

This policy addresses the need of employers to receive medical restrictions from health care practitioners in order to design safe and suitable work for injured workers.

This policy is reproduced in the College of Physician's and Surgeons of Saskatchewan, Spring 2007 newsletter, which also contains an article giving further explanation. In this article, Dr. Shaw writes:

It may be of some assistance to share this policy with patients to assist them to understand that the physician's role in certifying illness or assessing capacity of work is to provide an objective evaluation and report the limitations that the patient/worker's injury/illness places on their ability to perform certain functions. It is the responsibility of the employer to manage the worker's return to modified or usual work duties with the benefit of the objective professional input from physicians and/or other health professionals.

College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan, Spring 2007 newsletter, "Role of Physicians in Certifying Illness and/or Assessing Capacity for Work", K. Shaw, MD, Deputy Registrar.

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Support Package for Physicians Treating Injured Workers

In December 2006, (updated October 2010), the WCB developed a publication to assist physicians in managing injured workers' recovery and return to work. It is a resource designed to provide guidance for physicians and helps define the roles and responsibilities physicians have in recovery and return to work processes.

The physician has a responsibility to maintain communication with the worker and the WCB about the extent of the worker's injury and the expected recovery timeline. The physician also has a responsibility to provide to the WCB and to the employer (via the worker) information about any restrictions the worker may have because of the injury, and to update any restrictions as the worker's condition progresses.

In almost all circumstances, restrictions should be provided unless the worker is hospitalized or house bound. The list of restrictions allows the employer to identify if appropriate work is available for the worker while they are recovering. The onus is on the employer to match work to the restrictions the physician has outlined.

A Support Package for Physicians Treating Injured Workers, Section 5, page 6, Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board, December 2006 (Last updated 2010).

In a RTW process, it is the health care provider's (HCP's) role to say what the worker can and cannot do medically. It is then up to the employer to match the work to the restrictions.

The primary practitioner:

- *Assesses the injury and develops a treatment plan;*
- *Lays the groundwork for early return to work by providing the worker a list of restrictions and shares this list with the employer*

The WCB's "The Right Care at the Right Time", 11/2015.

While caring for an injured worker, the health care provider will:

- *Set out a treatment plan*
- *Start return to work planning by listing any restrictions the worker has because of the injury*
- *Share this list with the worker and employer*
- *Report the injury to the WCB*

The WCB's "Recovery & Return to Work for Injured Workers", 11/2015.

