



Return to Work (RTW)-

Collaborating with All Parties to
Achieve Safe & Sustained RTW

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Objectives

- Define sustained RTW and its benefits.
- Identify the members of the RTW planning team and describe their roles.
- Identify the potential opportunities or barriers for safe and sustained RTW.
- Describe a process to address the barriers to sustained RTW.

Philosophy of Early, Safe RTW

- Injured employees can safely return to productive work of some kind during the process of recovery.
- Work as therapy then becomes an essential element of RTW success.

Steenstra et al. (2006) *OEM* 63(11): 718-725 3

What Do We Mean by Sustained RTW ?

“The worker returns to work and remains working for greater than 90 days.”

Linz, Ford, Nightingale, Shannon,
Davlin, Bradford & Shepard, *JOEM* 2001

Sustained RTW

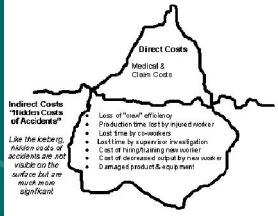
The worker returns to work as soon as safely possible, with or without restrictions, and regularly progresses in his/her work capabilities without interruption until he/she can perform all essential job functions with or without permanent modifications.

- C. Morris and K. Schmidt, 2006

Benefits of Safe and Sustained-RTW

- Promotes healing while avoiding re-injury
- Improves workplace morale
- Maintains production
- Ensures cost effective medical treatment

Direct Costs Are Just the Tip of the Iceberg



"Like the iceberg, hidden costs of accidents are not visible on the surface but are much more significant."

Source: People@Work Newsletter, May 2003 Volume 1, Number & 7

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Return to Work Statistics

- If someone is out of work for 6 months
 - 50% chance of achieving return to work
- If someone is out of work for 1 year
 - 25% chance of achieving return to work
- If someone is out of work for 2 years
 - Virtually no chance of achieving return to work

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

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Getting Injured Workers Back to Work:

It Takes a Village ...



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Shared Responsibilities for Return to Work

- Injured Worker
- Employer/Supervisor
- Treating Physician
- Company Physician/Occupational Health Nurse (OHN)
- RN Case Manager
- Insured Claims Handler



-LMRIS B. Shaw

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Role of Injured Worker

- Notify the employer of injury ASAP
- Seek appropriate medical treatment
- Be adherent with the medical treatment
- Be an active part of the RTW plan
- Help identify possible modified work opportunities
- Identify social factors and other mental stressors



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Role of the Employer

- Institute procedures for early intervention
- Provide functional job descriptions
- Prompt contact with employee initially and continued follow up
- Work with the team to identify work
- Investigate the injury and make changes to prevent future injuries



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Role of the Treating Physician

- Assess, diagnose, and treat the injury with Evidence Based Medicine
- Evaluate the mechanism of injury in relation to the severity
- Review job descriptions & provide RTW targets
- Provide clearly written physical capabilities
- Identify healing plateau & permanent partial disability (PPD)
- Communicate with RTW team



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Role of OHN / RN Case Managers

- Assess overall needs for recovery & RTW
- Assess barriers to recovery and create a plan to address them
- Establish RTW as the goal at the outset
- Coordinate care and services
- Coordinate worksite interventions
- Evaluate employee's progress regularly
- Communicate regularly with the team
- Work with the employer to prevent recurrence



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Capability, Not Disability

- RTW depends on establishing a good match between worker capabilities and functional job requirements
- If match not established, injured worker may not be able to progress in RTW process



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Potential Barriers to Sustaining RTW – Injured Worker

- Medical
 - Co-morbid conditions
 - Prolonged inactivity
 - Perceived physical roadblocks: can't drive, needs to elevate/ice foot, needs to keep wounds clean, etc.
 - Early attorney involvement
- Biopsychosocial
 - Fear of re-injury and/or or pain
 - Prior history of repeated injuries with time off work
 - Failure to communicate with employer/co-workers
 - Pre-injury job dissatisfaction and/or job performance.

Schultz, Pain 107 (2004) 77–85

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Potential Barriers to Sustaining RTW - Employer

- Lack of awareness of the real costs of disability
- Failure to communicate with injured worker
- Low staff morale
- Lack of training to provide appropriate modifications and ongoing support
- Failure to identify obstacles to sustaining RTW

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Potential Barriers RTW - Provider

- Lack of knowledge about the workplace
- Physician focuses on restrictions and not abilities
- Multiple providers
- No confidence /trust with employer
- Concerns that proposed job will aggravate injury

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Good News!

Many of these barriers can be addressed by a medical case management process that embraces the goal of safe and sustained RTW.



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Medical Case Management Process



All RTW team members work on the case but someone needs to take the lead - to be the liaison between all parties involved.

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Medical Case Management Process

- Review what is known about the case
- Complete the "3-Point Contact" as soon as possible
- Set specific RTW goals and expectations early
- Identify the opportunities & barriers to reaching that goal
- Work with the employer to find work activities consistent with the current physical capabilities
- Address the barriers, if claimant is not able to RTW

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Barriers to Sustaining RTW – Injured Worker

Barrier	Actions to Take
Fear of re-injury and/or pain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe expected recovery process and timeline • Make sure the work fits the capabilities • Pain is bad, discomfort is OK • Work is therapeutic • Follow-up with worker at work to confirm a good fit
Physical roadblocks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange transportation, child care, etc. • Arrange for conservative care at work

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Addressing Barriers - Employer

Barrier	Actions to Take
History of not accommodating restrictions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide the data • Help identify job tasks the worker can do within the restrictions • Help the employer have their first success story

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Addressing Barriers - Provider

Barrier	Actions to Take
Concerns that proposed job will aggravate injury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field RN should attend appointments to clarify information or answer any questions regarding available jobs • Communicate plans for follow up with worker and employer to assess a good fit • Provide information regarding physical job requirements, gradual work schedule, support on the job
Provider unclear about RTW date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide Functional Duty Requirements • Provide ODG/MDA/ACOEM RTW dates and ask what objective findings warrant extension of these dates • Thank physician for their help in getting this patient well and back to work • Involve company/Occ Med MD for physician to physician contacts, as needed

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Sustained RTW - Modified Duty

- Maintain regular contact with the worker after RTW modified duty
- Address new barriers as they arise
- Continue to ask for advancing work capabilities and maximum medical improvement (MMI) when appropriate

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Achieving a Safe and Sustained RTW

- Laying the ground work begins "Day 1"
- RN Case Manager/OHN = quarterback + coach + trusted advisor
- Recovery & RTW must be mutually reinforcing
- Be INNOVATIVE
- Engage the Physician!

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Questions and Answers



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