

# RETAIN

Retaining Employment  
and Talent After  
Injury/Illness Network



## For Your Insight: Research and Practice From the Field

**October 30, 2019**

Have a tip or resource to share? [Email us!](#)

This biweekly update highlights relevant research for RETAIN states and summarizes key takeaways that may benefit program implementation. Each summary includes a link to the article, resource, or formal abstract.

### **Lag Times in Reporting Injuries, Receiving Medical Care, and Missing Work: Associations With the Length of Work Disability in Occupational Back Injuries**

In a retrospective analysis of workers' compensation (WC) claims data following low back injuries, Bensen et al. (2016) examined "...the association between lag times following occupational low back injury and the length of work disability." The researchers focused on three distinct types of lag time: the lag time between (1) when an injury took place and when it was reported to the WC insurer; (2) when an injury took place and when the injured worker first received treatment for their injury; and (3) when the injury took place and when the injured worker first missed work or "initiated light duty work." The study found that, across all three types of lag times, shorter lag times after low back injury were related to shorter length of work disability. The study concludes that decreasing the length of lag times between injury and reporting injuries, receiving medical care, and missing work may decrease the length of work disability for this population of injured workers. The authors state that, "with [these findings] in mind, interested parties, such as employers or insurers, may consider creating benchmarks for reporting a work-related injury no later than 2 weeks after the injury has occurred."

Full text available: [Besen, E., & Mason Harrell III, G. P. \(2016\). Lag times in reporting injuries, receiving medical care, and missing work: Associations with the length of work disability in occupational back injuries. \*Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine\*, 58\(1\), 53.](#)

Tags: Early intervention; length of work disability; low back injury

### **Return-to-Work Within a Complex and Dynamic Organizational Work Disability System**

Through working with 30 stakeholders, including senior managers, frontline supervisors, and frontline workers at two U.S. companies, Jetha (2016) aimed to explore the complex systems within return to work (RTW) processes. To do so, Jetha created a system dynamics model (SDM) at each company, “to examine how feedback relationships between individual, psychosocial, and organizational factors make up the work disability system and influence RTW.” SDM allows for the development of “...new insights on how multiple influential factors make up the work disability system and impact RTW.” Feedback from stakeholders and previously published literature identified multidimensional SDMs: “Results from model building in both companies showed that individual, social and organizational components and their feedback relationships made up the work disability system and influenced RTW.” The author concludes that these different components may be important to leverage within company RTW systems to affect outcomes in RTW, and that policy makers should consider these systems when designing and implementing RTW policies within organizations.

Full text available: [Jetha, A., Pransky, G., Fish, J., & Hettinger, L. J. \(2016\). Return-to-work within a complex and dynamic organizational work disability system. \*Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation\*, 26\(3\), 276–285.](#)

Tags: Psychosocial and organizational factors; RTW; employers

## **An Examination of Factors Influencing Responses to Requests for Disability Accommodations**

In their study examining individual factors contributing to granting disability accommodations, Carpenter and Paetzold (2013) found that several factors related to individual characteristics that may influence an injured worker’s accommodation request being approved, despite laws regarding reasonable accommodations for injured workers established by the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act. The researchers asked 240 people to share if they would grant a disability accommodation to a hypothetical worker in various scenarios, “...in which aspects of the requestor's disability and the accommodation request were manipulated.” The research team found “...that intentions to grant an accommodation were predicted by a number of factors, including emotional responses toward the requestor, characteristics of the impairment causing the disability, characteristics of the accommodation, and perceptions of fairness.” The study concludes that there are many factors—outside those set by law—that are likely influencing disability accommodation requests being approved or denied.

Abstract available: [Carpenter, N. C., & Paetzold, R. L. \(2013\). An examination of factors influencing responses to requests for disability accommodations. \*Rehabilitation Psychology\*, 58\(1\), 18–27.](#)

Tags: Accommodation requests

## **Promoting Early, Safe Return to Work in Injured Employees: A Randomized Trial of a Supervisor Training Intervention in a Healthcare Setting**

In a randomized study comparing two groups of supervisors within one hospital, Spector et al. (2017) compared a group of supervisors who received a brief, 15–20-minute audiovisual training module on RTW knowledge and attitudes with a group of supervisors who did not receive the training. Although the supervisors who took part in the training module demonstrated an immediate “...improved confidence in communicating with injured employees, identifying/arranging modified duty, and answering injured employees’ questions,” the two groups of supervisors did not differ from each other in their RTW attitudes and knowledge 3 months after the start of the study.

The research team developed the training module for hospital learning management systems “...to promote early, safe RTW in injured employees.” The training module included avatars of characters representing a supervisor, an injured employee, and a consultant from human resources. The supervisor character was shown modeling best practices in RTW. The training module included the following key topics: “(1) helping injured employees seek appropriate medical care; (2) filling out incident reports; (3) communicating with employees; (4) identifying modified and light duty; and (5) seeking RTW financial incentives.”

Abstract available: [Spector, J. T., & Reul, N. K. \(2017\). Promoting early, safe return to work in injured employees: A randomized trial of a supervisor training intervention in a healthcare setting. \*Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation, 27\*\(1\), 70–81.](#)

Tags: RTW training, supervisors, RTW competencies

This document was prepared for the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Office of Disability Employment Policy and Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network (RETAIN) state grantees, by the American Institutes for Research under DOL Contract Number 1605DC-18-F-00429. The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to DOL, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement of same by the U.S. Government.