

For Your Insight: Research and Practice From the Field

January 22, 2020

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

Early Predictors of Occupational Back Reinjury: Results From a Prospective Study of Workers in Washington State

Keeney and colleagues (2013) examine the early predictors of self-reported back reinjury within 1 year of the initial injury. The authors conducted interviews with 1,123 workers identified through the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries claims database. One year after the initial injury, 25.8% of workers reinjured their back upon return to work. The authors found that strong predictors of back reinjury include male gender, constant whole-body vibration at work, a history of previous similar injury, three or more previous workers' compensation claims of any type, having health insurance, and high fear-avoidance scores. Constant whole-body vibration occurs when the entire body is supported on something that vibrates (e.g., a machine or vehicle). High fear-avoidance scores are based on an individual's avoidance of physical activity due to the fear of pain. Of the predictors, the strongest predictor of back reinjury was three or more previous compensation claims of any type, which had 2.29 times the odds of self-reported reinjury compared to workers who reported no previous claims. The authors conclude that when clinicians are aware of reinjury predictors and other reinjury risk factors, they may be able to improve their reinjury prevention efforts.

Abstract available: [Keeney, B. J., Turner, J. A., Fulton-Kehoe, D., Wickizer, T. M., Chan, K. C. G., & Franklin, G. M. \(2013\). Early predictors of occupational back reinjury: Results from a prospective study of workers in Washington state. *Spine*, 38\(2\), 178–187. doi:10.1097/brs.0b013e318266187d](#)

Tags: back injury, return to work

The Relationship Between Work-Disability Duration and Claimant's Expected Time to Return to Work as Recorded by Workers' Compensation Claims Managers

Young, Besen, and Willetts (2017) examine the relationship between injured workers' return to work (RTW) expectations and their actual dates of RTW. The authors look at whether injured workers' estimates of when they would RTW match the actual duration of compensated temporary total disability, defined as temporary pay for an injured worker out of work due to injury or illness. The authors found a "[...] significant relationship between expected time to RTW and work-disability duration," with a high percentage of claims matching or close to the injured worker's originally estimated RTW date. Injured workers with the highest rate of accuracy in predicting their RTW dates were those who expected to be back at work within 7 days (43% accuracy). For those workers who expected to RTW in more than 7 days, accuracy of their predictions was 20%. Overall, the study found that 28% of workers estimated RTW dates within a week of their actual return dates, and 41% of workers estimated RTW dates within 2 weeks of their actual return dates. The authors conclude that injured workers' expectations for RTW can provide insight into work-disability duration and future RTW outcomes.

Abstract available: [Young, A. E., Besen, E., & Willetts, J. \(2016\). The relationship between work-disability duration and claimant's expected time to return to work as recorded by workers' compensation claims managers. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 27\(2\), 284–295. doi:10.1007/s10926-016-9656-z](#)

Tags: return to work, workers' compensation

Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work: Key Facts, Critical Information Gaps, and Current Practices and Proposals

This report highlights information for states interested in piloting stay-at-work (SAW) and return-to-work (RTW) interventions. The first part of the report reviews 13 existing job retention programs. One example highlights Washington's Centers of Occupational Health and Education program contracts with community-based programs that are part of healthcare organizations to work with medical providers on SAW/RTW issues. Another example spotlights Ohio's Transitional Work Grants program, which provides employers with funds to help injured workers complete transitional work while recovering from injury. The next part of the report summarizes 31 ideas that states can use to demonstrate interventions organized into six categories: (1) pre-Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) application interventions targeting workers; (2) pre-application interventions for youth and young adults; (3) pre-application interventions targeting both workers and youth; (4) diversion of SSDI applicants into alternative, work-oriented support; (5) partial benefits for beneficiaries; and (6) demonstration and waiver authority. One example of pre-SSDI application interventions targeting workers category includes providing retention bonuses to injured workers who RTW by a specific date. An example of partial benefits for beneficiaries includes allowing injured workers to collect partial, short-term disability payments when they RTW on a part-time basis.

Report available: [Ben-Shalom, Y., Bruns, S., Contreary, K., & Stapleton, D. \(2016\). *Stay-at-work/return-to-work: Key facts, critical information gaps, and current practices and proposals*. Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research](#)

Tags: stay at work, return to work, intervention examples

Promoting Retention or Reemployment of Workers After a Significant Injury or Illness

This report reviews policies and practices to help employers retain and reemploy workers who leave the labor force because of disability. The report examines federal legislation and workplace practices, including (1) legislative protections such as the American with Disabilities Act, the Family and Medical Leave Act, and workers' compensation; (2) workplace practices such as providing private disability insurance (PDI) and workplace culture, and (3) social safety net programs such as vocational rehabilitation, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and other programs for adults under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. The report also highlights workplace policies and practices that employers can leverage to retain and reemploy workers, including (1) policies that provide incentives for employers to retain workers, such as mandatory PDI; (2) policies that reduce layoffs, such as mandatory severance pay; (3) leveraging temporary employment agencies to act as a vehicle to reemployment, such as the Ticket to Work program, which develops employability plans for injured workers; and (4) policies that promote employer tax credits, which may include subsidies that lower the cost of reemployment or increase the benefits of reemployment. The report concludes with action steps that states can take to promote worker retention and reemployment. These action steps include disseminating relevant information (e.g., information on best practices for retaining workers) directly to supervisors and developing financial incentives that increase the benefits of retention without increasing the cost of separation.

Report available: [Hollenbeck, K. \(2015\). *Promoting retention or reemployment of workers after a significant injury or illness*. Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research](#)

Tags: retention, reemployment, policy

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