

For Your Insight: Research and Practice From the Field

January 6, 2021

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This monthly update highlights relevant research for RETAIN states and summarizes key takeaways that may benefit program implementation. Each summary includes a link to an article, a resource, or a formal abstract. An accessible version of For Your Insight is attached to this email.

Return-to-Work Outcomes Following Work Disability: Stakeholder Motivations, Interests and Concerns

Young and colleagues (2005) reviewed the literature to identify the reasons key stakeholders take part in the RTW process. The review defined five key stakeholder groups that are part of RTW practice: 1) Workers, 2) Employers, 3) Healthcare providers, 4) Payers (i.e., workers' compensation insurance companies); and 5) Society (i.e., political, economic, and legislative systems). For workers, reasons for RTW were earning potential (i.e., RTW financially benefits most workers), health and quality of life, reestablishing one's sense of health, and maintaining a desired place in society. The primary reasons employers support RTW is reducing the cost of work absences, insurance premiums (i.e., workers' compensation), and meeting production goals. The reasons healthcare providers support RTW are the health of their clients and referrals they receive from their success in helping workers RTW. Payers have a direct interest to facilitate RTW so they can lower compensation payments. For society, the reasons to support RTW include reducing disability related expenses and increasing the revenue base to fund societal services. Though each stakeholder share the goal of RTW, they each benefit differently from their role. The authors conclude that understanding stakeholders shared and competing goals is important for researchers in advancing and understanding RTW outcomes and interventions.

Article available: [Young, Amanda E., et al. "Return-to-Work Outcomes Following Work Disability: Stakeholder Motivations, Interests and Concerns." *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, vol. 15, no. 4, 2005, pp. 543-556.](#)

Tags: RTW, Stakeholders

Outcomes in Work-Related Injuries: A Comparison of Older and Younger Workers

Pransky and colleagues (2005) surveyed workers to examine the role of age (i.e., older, younger) on occupational, health, and financial outcomes after work injury. The authors defined older workers as older than 55 and younger workers as under the age of 55. The authors found that the only outcome associated with age was injury-related financial difficulties. Age was not related to other RTW outcomes, including change in job performance after injury, injury-related pain, and use of pain medications. Compared with younger workers, older workers had more financial stability after work injury. The authors hypothesize that older workers may have more well-established relationships in

the workplace, greater job flexibility, and be less concerned about future employment because they are closer to retirement. Compared with older workers, younger workers also had “lower preinjury job satisfaction, experienced less positive responses from employers, were less satisfied with the response of the workers’ compensation insurer post injury, and had more problems on returning to work.” The authors conclude that factors such as job satisfaction and post-injury employer response may play a greater role in RTW outcomes than age.

Abstract available: [Pransky, Glenn S., et al. “Outcomes in Work-Related Injuries: A Comparison of Older and Younger Workers.” *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2005, pp. 104–112](#)

Tags: RTW, age related factors

Conceptual, Methodological, and Measurement Challenges in Addressing Return to Work in Workers with Musculoskeletal Disorders

In this book chapter, Main and Shaw (2016) review challenges in evaluating and measuring return to work (RTW) interventions in workers with musculoskeletal disorders. The authors describe two major shifts in practice addressing RTW issues for these workers: 1) a shift from a focus on clinical medicine toward patient-centered care, and 2) a shift from occupational medicine toward the psychosocial components of work and the work environment. This shift correlates with strong evidence to consider both the worker and working environment when considering RTW interventions.

However, “poor conceptualization, weak methodology, and overreliance on measurement tools designed in earlier eras have hindered progress in understanding the processes involved in developing, implementing, and evaluating successful interventions.” To evaluate new interventions effectively, studies comparing the measures currently available are needed. New ways of measuring should be also considered when designing new interventions.

Abstract available: [Main, C., & Shaw, W. \(2016\). “Conceptual, Methodological, and Measurement Challenges in Addressing Return to Work in Workers with Musculoskeletal Disorders.” *Handbooks in Health, Work, and Disability Handbook of Return to Work*, pp. 423–438](#)

Tags: RTW, musculoskeletal disorders, measures

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