

For Your Insight: Research and Practice From the Field Vol. 26

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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.

Adaptation of a Guide to Equip Employers to Manage the Gradual Return to Work of Individuals With a Musculoskeletal Disorder

Bouffard and colleagues (2019) took a tool that was created for rehabilitation professionals and adapted it for employers to help workers with musculoskeletal conditions (MSD) gradually return to work (RTW). To adapt the tool, the authors removed specialized content for rehabilitation professionals and added plain language text for employers. This adapted tool includes planning worksheets that are divided into 12 sections for the worker and employer to complete at different times during the week. Sections 1–9 (to be completed at the beginning of the week) focus on listing the treating physician’s restrictions and recommendations for the worker as well as the planned work schedule, identified work tasks, expected productivity and obstacles, and strategies for overcoming obstacles. Sections 10–12 (to be completed at the end of the week) focus on whether production goals were met and also gauge any increase in the worker’s discomfort. In addition, the tool includes a 21-page guide with instructions on how to use the worksheets. The authors tested the adapted tool with content experts in the field (e.g., occupational therapists) and then met to discuss suggested modifications to the tool until the group reached consensus. The authors also interviewed potential users (e.g., employers) to determine the tool’s acceptability to them. Employers found the tool to be “acceptable, useful, and pertinent.” The authors conclude that the adapted tool may support employers in helping individuals with MSD gradually return to work.

Abstract available: [Bouffard, J., Durand, M.-J., & Coutu, M.-F. \(2019\). Adaptation of a guide to equip employers to manage the gradual return to work of individuals with a musculoskeletal disorder. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 29\(3\), 625–635.](#)

Tags: musculoskeletal, RTW, tool, employers

Using Multiple Stakeholders to Define a Successful Return to Work: A Concept Mapping Approach

Leyshon and Shaw (2012) interviewed 24 RTW stakeholders (e.g., injured workers, employers, co-workers, occupational therapists) to identify successful RTW outcomes. The authors used the data from these interviews to map a universal way to measure RTW outcomes that accounts for the perspectives of workers and other stakeholders. The authors identified six concepts that stakeholders believe are important to successful RTW: (1) worker performance, (2) worker well-being, (3) human rights (e.g., ensuring worker’s injury is not stigmatized in the workplace), (4) satisfaction of stakeholders other than the worker, (5) worker job satisfaction, and (6) a seamless RTW process based on collaborative communication. These six concepts are a shift from the current way of looking at RTW outcome measures, which is based on whether a worker is working or not. The concepts

the authors identified represent a potential way of measuring RTW outcomes that focuses on the worker and RTW success. The authors conclude that the six concepts generated from this study can be used for future research to further develop a new universal RTW outcome measure.

Abstract available: [Leyshon, R., & Shaw, L. \(2012\). Using multiple stakeholders to define a successful return to work: A concept mapping approach. *Work*, 41\(4\), 397–408.](#)

Tags: RTW, measurement outcomes, stakeholders

The Timing of Physical Therapy for Low Back Pain: Does It Matter in Workers' Compensation?

Wang and colleagues (2020) reviewed workers' compensation claims to study the relationship between physical therapy for lower back pain and the use of medical services, the cost of medical services, and the duration of temporary disability. The authors found that workers with lower back pain who received physical therapy 14 days or more after injury were more likely to use medical services and had a longer duration of temporary disability compared with workers who received physical therapy before the 14-day mark. Compared with workers who started physical therapy within 3 days of their injury, workers who started physical therapy after 30 days were "47 percent more likely to receive MRI and 46 percent more likely to receive opioid prescriptions." The average medical cost per claim for workers who started physical therapy after 30 days was 28% higher compared with workers who started physical therapy within 7 days. Temporary disability duration was 24% longer for workers who initiated physical therapy after 14 days and 58%–69% longer for workers who initiated physical therapy after 30 days compared with workers who started physical therapy within 7 days. The authors conclude that early initiation of physical therapy for workers with low back pain is important for reducing the use of medical services, the cost of medical services, and the duration of temporary disability.

Abstract available: [Wang, D., Mueller, K., & Lea, R. \(2020\). *The timing of physical therapy for low back pain: Does it matter in workers' compensation?* Workers Compensation Research Institute.](#)

Tags: Workers' compensation, physical therapy, disability

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