

For Your Insight: Research and Practice From the Field Vol. 30

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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.

Getting the Message Right: Evidence-Based Insights to Improve Organizational Return-to-Work Communication Practices

Jetha and colleagues (2021) examined return-to-work (RTW) communication practices and how they affect work disability management. The authors interviewed 40 workplace stakeholders, including union and workers' compensation representatives, disability management professionals, workers, and supervisors. From the interviews, the authors identified five communication strategies that are important for effective work disability management:

- *Relaying messages of support*—providing messages of support to injured workers with information about the RTW process.
- *Optimizing the timing of communication*—early contact with injured workers serves as a chance to build relationships and to exchange information about RTW.
- *Careful word choice*—simplifying technical and legal language and explaining the components of the RTW process.
- *Framing messages of support*—highlighting the benefits of RTW when providing messages of support seems to resonate most with injured workers.
- *Tailoring communication to the injured worker*—tailor communication strategies based on characteristics of the injured worker such as age, education level, job role, and their readiness to RTW.

The authors concluded that communication between workplace stakeholders and injured workers is critical for successfully managing work disability. Organizations can use findings from this research to strengthen their RTW communication practices.

Full text available: [Jetha, A., Pouésard, M. L., Mustard, C., Backman, C., & Gignac, M. A. \(2021\). Getting the message right: Evidence-based insights to improve organizational return-to-work communication practices. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*. doi:10.1007/s10926-021-09961-y](#)

Tags: RTW, disability management, communication practices

Disability Management Training for Supervisors: A Pilot Intervention Program

McLellan and colleagues (2001) conducted a study to assess trainings designed to help supervisors improve disability outcomes. An occupational health nurse practitioner provided 108 work supervisors with a training focused on supportive responses to injured workers with musculoskeletal conditions. The training was designed to promote a “supportive approach to workers with work-related discomfort, facilitate communication, encourage reporting of injury or health concerns among workers, and implement accommodations whenever possible.” Specific training elements included “meeting privately with injured workers, validating health concerns, using supportive language, and making recommendations for seeking additional resources or medical care.” The authors surveyed the supervisors 1 month and 1 year after the training. The 1-month survey tested the retention of the information in the training. The 1-year survey asked supervisors to recall the most helpful aspects of the training and gauged whether they felt that their skills had increased, decreased, or stayed the same. The authors found improvements in supervisors’ ability to manage disability, including increased confidence in investigating job factors that contribute to injury, getting medical advice, and answering employees’ questions related to injury. One year after the training, the authors found that supervisors identified communication as the most important factor for reducing work disability. The authors concluded that the training was effective at helping supervisors improve work disability outcomes.

Full text available: [McLellan, R. K., Shaw, W. S., & Pransky, G. \(2001\). Disability management training for supervisors: A pilot intervention program. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 1\(11\).](#)

Tags: RTW, supervisors, musculoskeletal conditions

Systematic Review of the Impact on Return to Work of Return-to-Work Coordinators

Dol and colleagues (2021) conducted a systematic literature review to examine the impact that RTW coordinators have on RTW outcomes. After the full-text screening of 221 articles, 27 articles were found to be relevant and were assessed for methodological quality using a 20-question quality assessment. Nine of the 27 articles were assessed as high quality, 5 were assessed as medium quality, and 13 were assessed as low quality. The 13 low-quality articles were excluded. The authors focused on literature related to RTW coordinator practices (e.g., developing an RTW plan) that support four worker outcomes: (1) work absence, (2) RTW rates, (3) quality of life, and (4) cost–benefit to employers. The authors determined the strength of evidence for each RTW coordinator practice and the related worker outcomes by the number of high- and medium-quality articles supporting that practice. Based on the number of high- and medium-quality articles, the authors classified RTW practices as having strong, moderate, or limited evidence. The authors found strong evidence that injured workers who have in-person contact with RTW coordinators had fewer work absences (e.g., were out of work for less time) and higher RTW rates. In-person contact showed moderate evidence for reducing RTW costs. Training RTW coordinators, developing an RTW plan, and ergonomic worksite evaluations showed moderate evidence for reducing work absences but showed limited evidence for influencing RTW rates, quality of life, or cost–benefit. Communication/coordination among different stakeholders showed moderate evidence for reducing employer RTW costs but limited evidence for the other outcomes. Identifying barriers and facilitators to RTW showed strong evidence for reducing work absences and moderate evidence for reducing RTW costs. The authors concluded that in-person contact had the strongest evidence for reducing work absences and costs, and improving RTW rates. They also concluded that identifying barriers and facilitators to RTW showed strong evidence for reducing work absences and RTW costs for employers. More research is needed on how RTW coordinators may improve outcomes for injured workers.

Abstract available: [Dol, M., Varatharajan, S., Neiterman, E., Mcknight, E., Crouch, M., Mcdonald, E., Malachowski, C., Dali, N., Giau, E., & Maceachen, E. \(2021\). Systematic review of the impact on return to work of return-to-work coordinators. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*. doi:10.1007/s10926-021-09975-6](#)

Tags: RTW coordinators, RTW outcomes

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