Time off Work following Injury – Cause & Effect

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Overview

- The Individual and Organisational Influences of Time off Work from Injury

- The Impact of Time off Work from Injury on Individuals and Organisations

- Planning for Return to Work from Injury – the Employer’s Role
  - Managing Perceptions and Personal Characteristics
  - Early Intervention and RTW Planning
Individual Influences of Time Off Work

- When asked to rank the barriers to return to work from injury, the actual impairment ranks the lowest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANKING THE BARRIERS</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>RANK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological / Cognitive</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symptom Percentage (esp: pain, fatigue)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impaired Function</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Individual Influences of Time Off Work

- The length of time away from work is most influenced by:
  - Perceptions of the injured worker – about injury, recovery times, workplace support, and RTW options
  - The relationship between worker and employer
  - Personal factors of the individual worker – Age, Gender and Type of Injury
Individual Influences of Time Off Work

- Workers who return to work before they are fully recovered generally find that work assists them with their overall recovery.
- To maximise the benefits of RTW, workers need to feel both physically and emotionally ready.
- Health literacy, relationship with employer, and involvement in identifying RTW duties can help improve readiness.
Organisational Influences of Time off Work

- The overarching organisational culture determines how individual workers perceive attitudes toward workplace injuries and RTW.
Organisational Influences of Time off Work

- Factors which influence Culture relating to RTW include:
  - Management attitudes towards injury and RTW
  - Previous experiences with injury and RTW
  - Employee involvement in injury and RTW processes
  - Communication at all levels about injury and RTW
  - Education on injury and RTW
  - Knowledge and understand of Supervisors / Team leaders on Injury and RTW
### Impact of Time off Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Off Work</th>
<th>Probability of RTW</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Carbelas, T 2007
Impact of time off work:

For Individuals, Time off Work can lead to:

- Poorer physical health
- Poorer mental health
- More medical care
- Poorer social integration
- Loss of worth and self-confidence
- Less monetary resources

As time off work increases, the impact on the individual also increases which in turn impacts on time off work
Impact of Time off Work

- For Organisations, increased time off work from injury can impact on:
  - Overall claim costs and durations
  - Reduced Productivity
  - Increased risk on other workers – additional workload associated with fewer workers
  - Potential costs to replace the injured worker – temporarily or permanently
  - Loss of skill and experience
  - Perceptions of other workers – how are injured workers treated?
Preparing for a Return to work

How can an Employer influence RTW?

- By Managing Perceptions
- By Being aware of personal factors
- Maintaining communication with the worker
- Early Intervention – act as soon as possible post-injury
Managing Perceptions and Personal Factors

- Common influences on perception of work incapacity include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low self efficacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low health literacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Catastrophizing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unstable relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sole parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job dissatisfaction/ low skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pervasive thoughts about illness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belief that stress is causal factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaming work / people for condition</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Preparing for RTW

- Employers who maintain communication with injured workers and look to understand their perceptions about RTW achieve better outcomes for all.

- How to manage perceptions:
  - Maintain open communication from time of injury - regardless of claim status.
  - Acknowledge Individual Factors.
  - Work to identify solutions and/or provide support.
  - Involve the worker in planning for RTW.
Preparing for RTW

- Utilise Rehabilitation Professionals early to assist with:
  - Identifying the injured worker’s needs
  - Managing barriers to RTW
  - Communication with treatment providers
  - Identifying and planning Suitable Duties
  - Providing education and guidance on managing the injury / workers once returned to work
Take away messages

- Time off work following injury impacts both the individual and the organisation
  - Chance of returning to work decreases as time off work increases
  - Worker perceptions of their injury, relationship with the employer, and capacity to return to work influences time off
  - Longer time off work impacts on overall claim costs and potential recruitment / retraining costs
- Early intervention post-injury and maintaining a relationship with the injured worker, is the best means of facilitating a positive outcome for all parties.