

Communicating with Doctors: Back to Basics

presented by Dr Matt Brandt

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Communicating with Doctors: Back to Basics

Dr Matt Brandt

1 April 2015

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Webinar Presenter: Dr Matt Brandt



Dr Brandt will discuss the communication process between the worker, workplace and the treating doctor. He will focus on potential difficulties, and strategies and solutions to enhance the effectiveness of communication in promoting and sustaining an early and safe return to work. Dr Brandt has worked in occupational and environmental medicine for over a decade. He has experience in:

- medical risk assessment
- evidence-based rehabilitation advice and analysis of causation of worker's compensation claims
- medico-legal reporting
- workplace assessment
- toxicology
- health education.

He has a strong interest in promoting health, wellbeing, workforce participation and optimum performance for organisations.

Webinar Overview

- Context
- Treating doctor roles
- Benefits of early communication
- Tips
- Potential barriers and solutions

Communication

A 'core' competency of the treating medical practitioner

- Primarily with patient +/- family, other health practitioners, and to lesser extent third parties (e.g. Medicare, Centrelink, Department of Veterans' Affairs)
- Workers' compensation process introduces multiple stakeholders: workers' compensation insurer, employer, +/- regulatory authority +/- legal profession.

Context

“Rehabilitation Team”

- Worker
- Nominated treating doctor+/- other treatment providers
- Employer: supervisor, Rehabilitation and Return to Work Coordinator (RRTWC)
- Workers' compensation claim manager / officer (insurer/ self insurer)

Roles & Responsibilities of Treating Doctor

- Early intervention and evidence-based treatment
- Facilitate rehabilitation focused on the worker returning to work
- Communicate regularly with insurer and employer
 - worker's capacity for work (focus on ability not disability)
 - updates on the worker's progress and/or amendments to treatment plan etc.

Benefits of early communication

Strong evidence that committed and coordinated communication and **early** action from key stakeholders is crucial in maximising a successful outcome

Treating health professionals exert a significant influence on work absence and work disability, particularly in relation to medical certification practices

Benefits of early communication

Doctors who communicate with the worker, employer and insurer can have a positive impact on the rehabilitation process

When early return to work is recommended by the treating doctor, it is significantly more likely that the individual will return to work

Benefits of early communication

Strong evidence¹ that contact between the health care provider and the employer is associated with a significant reduction in disability duration and associated costs

1. R Franche et al. 2004. Workplace-based Return-to-Work Interventions: A Systematic Review of the Quantitative and Qualitative Literature. Institute for Work & Health.

Objective of Communication

The establishment of an effective channel of communication involving key stakeholders, in order to facilitate recovery and a return to work as early as is safe and practicable

Poll Question 1

Q: What difficulties do you encounter when communicating with a treating medical practitioner (TMP) in order to facilitate rehabilitation and return to work? *(please use Poll on your right)*

- a) Treating medical practitioner not returning phone call
- b) Treating medical practitioner has a limited knowledge of workers' compensation
- c) Reception staff at practice
- d) Time restraints
- e) Geographical factors

Tips

- Organisational culture and management system facilitates early reporting
- If possible, early contact with injured worker before worker attends treating medical practitioner (TMP)
- Discuss with worker the possible options for suitable duties to be discussed with treating doctor

Tips continued

- Worker phones from home reporting that they are not coming in because they are ill or injured
 - Enquire in an empathetic manner, what the problem is
 - If the worker reports that they have sustained an injury, ask how it occurred
 - So if it could be a work-related injury, there is a need to intervene early and proactively

Tips continued

- Injured worker attends TMP as soon as possible following the event or reporting of symptoms
- If the employer is aligned with a medical clinic, can recommend that worker attends that practice
- This cannot be enforced and the worker can choose which doctor they wish to see

Tips continued

- Injured worker pack for worker and treating medical practitioner
 - Employer contact details
 - List of modified / suitable duties and task demand
 - Authority to release and obtain information signed by the injured worker
 - Company policy of commitment to provide suitable duties to injured worker
 - Information on the workers' compensation process including worker's and employer's' rights and responsibilities

Tips continued

- Establish contact with the TMP **as early as possible**
- Don't wait for the TMP to call you!
- Face-to-face would be the preferred mode of contact with the TMP
- If you can't attend the appointment, arrange to visit the clinic at a later time or arrange a telephone discussion with the TMP and fax an injured worker pack to the TMP.

Tips continued

- Offer to attend appointment with worker to advise TMP of accommodations and duties available to support return to work
- Employer should not expect to be present during the treatment consultation, but quite reasonable to ask to speak with the TMP upon completion of the treatment consultation

Tips to maximise the outcome from first contact with the TMP

- **Be prepared**
- Inform TMP of your role to support a valuable member of your workforce to remain at / return to work, by ensuring that duties are supplied within the medical restrictions provided by the TMP.
- Suitable / modified duties available as soon as worker is considered to be medically able to return to work.
- Regular review of worker's recovery and progress

Tips continued

- Attend review appointments / follow up with telephone calls / videoconferencing with doctor to discuss worker's recovery and work capacity
- Be available to participate in case conference with worker, treating doctor and insurer
- Invite the TMP to the workplace to view the tasks and assist in identifying suitable duties for your worker.

POLL QUESTION 2

Q: What do you find useful when communicating with the treating medical practitioner (TMP)? *(please use Poll on your right)*

- a) Attending the review appointments/ case conferences
- b) Following up with a phone call
- c) TMP Understanding the requirements for Workers' Compensation medical certificate
- d) Inviting the treating medical practitioner to the workplace
- e) Following up with an email
- f) TMP Understanding the requirements for a suitable duties plan

Potential barriers and solutions

Potential barriers and solutions re: communication with the TMP

- Geographical factors
 - Consider alternative modes of communication e.g. telemedicine videoconferencing, skype
- ‘Gatekeeper’ (clinic reception staff)
 - Call the clinic and ask to speak to the doctor; if doctor is unavailable ask receptionist for the most convenient time to call back or whether you can leave your contact details so the doctor can return your call

Potential barriers and solutions continued

- The 'Gatekeeper' continued
 - Let receptionist know that you will forward an injured worker information pack by fax or email, if the information hasn't already been provided
 - Let TMP / receptionist know that TMP can charge for any phone calls (item number) for the time spent on the phone discussing the injured worker's return to work
 - Align with a medical practice with interest / expertise in Occupational Health
 - Build a relationship with the clinic manager

Potential barriers and solutions continued

- TMP not returning phone call
 - Find out which method of communication suits the doctor best
 - Endeavour to build a relationship with the clinic reception staff and doctor
 - Let doctor or receptionist know that the doctor can charge for any phone calls (item number) for the time spent on the phone discussing the injured worker's return to work
 - Inform the workers' compensation insurer

Potential barriers and solutions continued

- TMP may have limited appreciation / knowledge of workers' compensation process, 'Health benefits of work,' workplace /duties etc.
 - Be prepared to educate them!

Potential barriers and solutions continued

- Treating doctor advocacy
 - Reassure the doctor
 - Inform the treating doctor of your role in supporting the worker to remain at / return to work within medical restrictions
 - Their patient is a vital part of your workplace and you want to assist in any way you can with their recovery.
 - Suitable / modified duties are available as soon as their patient is considered to be medically able to return to work.
 - It is safe for their patient to return to work.
 - RTW is supported and regularly reviewed.

Workers' Compensation Medical Certificate

- An entry point to the worker's compensation process.
- Should be provided by TMP to the worker at the first consultation and thereafter with any change to treatment plan, work capacity, or rehabilitation plan.
- A time-dependent statement of fitness for work: a basis for developing a suitable duties plan.
 - If the work capacity / restrictions are unclear, contact TMP for clarification.

Questions



Resources

- Visit www.worksafe.qld.gov.au
- <https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/forms-and-resources/statistics/queensland-performance-against-national-strategy-targets>
- <https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/slaws-and-compliance/workers-compensations-laws>
- <https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/service-providers/working-with-us>
- www.rtwmatters.org
- [Realising the Health Benefits of Work](#), Position Paper (April 2010, Australasian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine)

Resources Continued...

- Visit www.worksafe.qld.gov.au
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