

Authors: Patrick Loisel, Glenn Pransky, William Shaw, Quan Nha Hong

Presenter: Patrick Loisel

Title: RETURN TO WORK COORDINATORS' COMPETENCIES

Abstract:

Work disability is multifactorial by nature, and is influenced by many stakeholders. Recent models of work disability identify the main players in the "arena" of RTW (return to work) as the disabled worker, the workplace, the insurance system and the healthcare system, all embedded in a sociopolitical and cultural environment. A relatively recent trend to facilitate RTW of disabled workers is relying primarily upon return to work coordinators (RTWC) (or case managers). Little is known about the competencies required to properly fulfill the RTWC's role, and whether a specific professional background is required for success. In order to investigate the essential competencies for fulfilling the RTWC' role, we have undertaken a study with the three following steps: 1) Interviews with scientists having published articles describing successful RTW interventions that include the workplace; 2) Focus groups of experienced RTWC and 3) an Internet survey of RTWC. The report of the survey is presented here.

A total of 148 RTWC responded to the survey (response rate 93 %). Professional backgrounds were mainly vocational counselors and nurses; others were human resource specialists, physiotherapists, kinesiologists, physicians, and ergonomists. They were employed by insurers, health care organizations, employers or were self-employed. The 20 highest rated competencies were the following:

1. Respecting and maintaining confidentiality.
2. Having ethical practices as a RTWC.
3. Having good listening skills.
4. Ability to communicate well verbally (phone, in person) and in writing (including email).
5. Being consistent between what you say and what you do.
6. Being approachable and available.
7. Being committed to the goal of early RTW.
8. Ability to relate well to workers and employers.
9. Ability to respond to others in a timely fashion.
10. Ability to instill trust and confidence in your role as the RTWC.
11. Having strong organizational and planning skills.
12. Being respectful of other people: their role, their beliefs and their cultures.
13. Ability to sort through data and identify what is important.
14. Being able to communicate in a non-threatening way.
15. Ability to uncover and evaluate underlying problems affecting RTW.
16. Being honest and frank in communications.
17. Ability to adjust communication to a particular situation and individual people.
18. Ability to evaluate and accurately describe job requirements.
19. Having patience with each stakeholder involved in the RTW process.
20. Having relationship-building skills

This study highlights the fact that competencies of RTWC are mainly of behavioral and organizational nature, rather than technical. This corresponds well to the complex field of work disability involving many stakeholders and the need to reconcile the needs and interests of the worker, the workplace and third parties, mainly insurers and healthcare providers, in each case. We think that this knowledge will help to develop appropriate programs for complementary training of professionals embracing the profession of RTWC and help organizations improving recruitment of qualified individuals for this role.