

IFDM 2010

Opportunities and Barriers to safe and early return to work: Applied/empirical studies

Transitional work can protect the productivity of the workforce. But, how?

Data will be presented that supports transitional return to work effectiveness internationally. Best practices will also share the means to achieve maximum return on investment.

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Transitional work can protect the productivity of the workforce. But, how?

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Research has repeatedly demonstrated that the longer someone is out of work the less likely it is that he or she will return to work. In fact, the Bureau of Labor Statistics in the United States indicates that someone who is out of work for greater than 6 months is 50% less likely to return to work. Early intervention with work hardening or transitional work that does not include light duty has proven itself an effective method at reducing time out work but how and for whom is this process most effective? This presentation will answer those questions as well as share best practices for achieving maximum results.

Transitional work is different than light duty and emphasizes a return to one's own position on a gradual basis. This proactive method of job modification is effective in both returning someone to work as well as in establishing guidelines for stay at work programs by utilizing tools and processes that prevent lost time events. The objective of transitional work is to assist employees in returning to the workplace with a planned process that ensures a safe and sustained return to productivity. Transitional work programs establish realistic expectations for employees and managers and acknowledge the value of an employee's capabilities. Transitional Work is directed at *transitioning* a worker from a no-work status to one where the worker is fully able to resume her/his previous job. With the cooperation of the treating physician, the goal is to work to place the employee in a position that may be filled as soon as the worker receives a partial release to work and he will work in this transitional job until such time as the medical restrictions are reduced such that the worker may regain full employment. Internationally there are some differences due to income protection plan design variance as well as health care delivery processes. This presentation will focus on the data that supports the effectiveness of transitional work globally as well as present best practices for implementing a successful program. Further, the presentation will present practical case studies that represent significant return on investment.

More specifically, the presentation will include four sections beginning with relevant research related to how and why transitional return to work is effective. This research is in process right now and will focus on a block of customers with transitional return to programs in place and a block of customers without transitional return to work in place. The variables noted will be duration of time out of work, long term disability incidence, and several demographic considerations such as age,

industry, and diagnostic category. An early intervention transitional return to work study will be presented from both Unum US and Unum UK.

Next the discussion will turn to principles of transitional return to work including necessary employer policies and practices in an effective program and discussion will include both the United States and UK. One of the keys to a successful program is a comprehensive solution that includes both policy and program components. Employers must wrap their RTW program around policies that support those practices including not only a modified duty policy but also an effective absence policy as well.

Then the program will transition into applications for transitional return to work including industry and diagnosis specifics. More specifically, effective transitional return to work begins with analysis of lost time data. The employer must understand who is disabled and who is not as well as who comes back to work and who does not before a strategic program can be put in place. Once the data points to areas of opportunity such as job title, diagnostic categories and locations or divisions then transitional return to work modifications can be determined and documented in advance of a worker ever going out on disability. This process allows for proactive and specific early return to work planning while taking the guess work out of the process for the RTW planner, the claimant, the employer and the physician.

Finally, an international discussion will wrap up the session with a specific guide for implementing a program with case study examples. More specifically, a hospital group in the United States will be detailed in which transitional return to work was responsible for reducing long term disability incidence by 79% as well as saving 8 duration days per short term disability claim in consecutive 6 month over 6 month comparisons. Specific discussion points will also include making the case to senior management, how to target the right transitional work candidates, supervisor training, and tracking results and evaluating overall effectiveness.