



# Job Ready Services

Job Ready Services, LLC

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## The Return to Work Test

In NC, the return to work of an injured worker most often depends on the physician. Physicians are asked to certify disability as well as make a determination on whether a person's injury or condition was "caused" by their job. Physicians are also asked to determine what was present before someone was injured, without having any information on that person's health or functionality before the injury. Physicians are usually aware when patients, employers or payers make requests based on hidden agendas and are uncomfortable making these types of determinations. There is good reason for this – physicians (with the exception of maybe Occupational Health MD's) are simply not trained to make these decisions effectively without objective information about the patient. Consequently, the decisions are based on subjective information – the physician will often defer to the Injured Worker about his/her abilities, which may or may not be accurately perceived. Worse, the physician has little or no information and must assume the patient needs to be out of work.

Other barriers include:

- **Inadequate job descriptions** – in an effort to save time, employers and adjusters send volumes of material regarding job duties, without any regard to the physical demands of the job. Without that information, it is impossible for the physician to determine whether the patient can do their job. Again, the inclination is to take the patient out of work.
- **Liability** – The employer, not the physician, has the liability of having that person back on the job. Inevitably, without adequate information about the patient's abilities, patients who were able to RTW are taken out of work and those that may not be able to do their job are released too soon to RTW.



**A Return to Work Test provides objective information about a person's safe, physical ability to do their job.**

**Lunch & Learn:**

**"Non-Surgical Treatment of Degenerative Disc Disease"**

Dr. Thomas Buchheit—Thursday, July 19, 2007

According to an article in the American College of Occupational & Environmental Medicine, "from a strictly medical point of view, people can generally work at something productive as soon as there is no specific medical contraindication to them being out of bed and back out in the 'real world'". Although it may seem harmless to be OOW for a few days, we all know that this can sometimes lead to needless extended disability and can even do significant harm.

A **Return to Work test** (aka: limited FCE or Fit for Duty) is an inexpensive, objective tool to determine current physical capabilities. It can be performed at any time (even the day after the injury) and can be repeated throughout the rehab process to determine functional improvement and enhance good outcomes. It is simple to read and can be given to the patient once the test is completed. The test results are sent to the employer and all parties the same day to aid in the safe return to work of the patient.

Other benefits include:

- Does not need a physician's order, although it is recommended to ask the physician if the person is safe to participate in the testing and is medically stable
- Takes less than 1 hour to perform
- Results immediately available to patient, employer and all other involved parties
- Can be used to assess progression in rehab (can be repeated) – keeps rehab accountable and "on track"
- If physical demands of the job are known, the RTW test can be used to match the patient's abilities to the job in question (whether it is transitional duty or full duty)
- Provides safe guidelines regarding the patient's physical abilities

**When to refer for a RTW test:**

- Patient is medically stable to be in the workplace, but capabilities are unclear
- BEFORE a consideration is made to take the patient out of work.
- ANYTIME physical abilities need to be assessed.
- To match job demands with patient's abilities.
- To set rehabilitation goals.

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