

JOB READY SERVICES



Think Work Conditioning is Expensive? Think Again!

October 2009

Upcoming Events

Lunch and Learn

Thursday, Oct 22, 2009

12:00pm—1:00pm

Job Ready Office

Age & Ergonomics

Debra Lord—Speaker

Credits approved:

CCM—1 hr

AAOHN-1 hr

Dept of Insurance- 1 hr

DID YOU KNOW?

In the state of NC, a physician referral is NOT needed for FCE, Fit for Duty or work conditioning referrals to a physical therapist. However, it is a good idea to notify the treating physician of the patients' participation in any one of these programs.

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Work conditioning and work hardening are not the same thing. Work conditioning is a daily program of exercises designed to prepare the injured worker to return to the physical demands of their job. It is NOT physical therapy. It is a structured program of physical conditioning, ergonomics training, and education in safe work practices to address the individualized needs of the IW as it relates to their return to a specific job or job type. (Work hardening programs often include a Psychologist, Vocational Counselor and/or Physician, of which work conditioning is only a portion of the program.)

Consider this recent case: A 40 yr old gentleman with a shoulder injury is released to RTW regular duty by his MD. His job requires lifting 35 lbs overhead at least 1/3 of his 12 hour shift (approx 60 times per shift). Employer is concerned about the RTW and sends him for a Fit for Duty test. It is discovered he can only lift 35 lbs overhead one time. Work conditioning is recommended, but the MD instead sends the worker for 6 more weeks of physical therapy (he has already had several months of therapy). After completing 6 weeks of PT, he returns for a Fit for Duty test. This time, he can lift 35 lbs overhead three times before he completely fatigues out. Finally, the MD recommends work conditioning. In 18 visits, the worker is released to RTW regular duty.

Considering the cost of one lost day (\$3,000 - \$7,000!) – work conditioning at the appropriate time would have saved thousands of dollars in this case. PT visits are designed to decrease pain, increase range of motion and increase strength. You will not see a PT goal that reads: "Must lift 35 lbs overhead, 60 times per day."

Work Conditioning vs. Invalid FCE:

What do you do with an invalid FCE? Often, injured workers are "released to RTW per the FCE" – but what if the FCE is invalid? Basing permanent restrictions on the LEAST that worker was able to do at the time of the FCE is inaccurate and at best, irresponsible. Consider work conditioning as a means to determine whether the worker can improve, given the opportunity to practice on a daily basis. Sometimes, apprehension at the time of the FCE is motivating the worker to not do as well as perhaps they could. But in a daily program with support, education and opportunity to practice, workers tend to improve their effort and therefore can be released with less restrictions than if they had been released to RTW based on the invalid FCE.

Improve Your Outcomes—Be Responsible AND Cost Effective:

When the injured employee has stabilized medically, but has not been able to RTW – consider a work conditioning program to enhance a successful outcome and help that employee RTW before becoming an out of work statistic. Every day that the employee is out of work, is one day closer to *never* returning to work.

Don't settle for "release to RTW per FCE" when the FCE is invalid. Even better, get injured workers involved early in a work conditioning program - especially if they have plateaued in their medical treatment, but have not returned to work yet. By participating in a work conditioning program, injured workers are given the opportunity to demonstrate sustained work ability, opportunities to practice, improve and return safely to work. (Often the need for an FCE is negated altogether when a worker is involved in a work conditioning program.) Help injured workers return to work based on objective evidence of their abilities - not a "guesstimate" of what they are able to do. Most importantly, research work conditioning programs to ensure they are offering services that are truly geared toward safe work abilities and not just more physical therapy. Be responsible as well as cost effective when assisting injured workers to return to work. For more information on what to look for in a work conditioning program, click here: <http://www.jobreadyservices.net/researchingwcpprograms.html>.