

Disability Management in Workplace

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to discuss the rationale for labour involvement in the management of injury and disability at the workplace. This article concerned with how developing disability management in the workplace could open the possibilities for work for people with disability and can be matched with the opportunities of increasing the employment rate. As the statistical facts and figures show, there is a problem of inadequate employment among people with disabilities and there is a negative tendency in it. The article discusses the importance of joint labour–management collaboration in the development and implementation of disability management and return-to-work programs. Best practices in disability management are reviewed, with a focus on important implications for joint labour–management committees. An overview of the key elements of formal return-to-work programs is discussed, including established benchmarks for return-to-work program development and implementation in workplace.

Key words: disability management / return to work program/workplace

I. Introduction

Disability management focuses on absences from work as a result of illness, injury or disability, and on preventing the risks that cause these absences. It is a deliberate and coordinated effort by employers to reduce the occurrence and effect of illness and injury on workforce productivity, and to promote employee attachment. Every supervisor will be faced with many challenges regardless the size of the work unit. Among the most complex of management's responsibilities is addressing absenteeism. Disability due to illness or injury is probably the most common reason given by employees who are absent from work. Although it is reasonable for employees to be excused for occasional absences due to illness or injury, the challenge is to manage absenteeism so that the departmental goals are still achieved. The goal is to create a work environment where employees are motivated to return to work as soon as medically possible because they feel supported and they know their work is valued.

Its three components are prevention, support for recovery and accommodation.



These components are mutually reinforcing. Benefits and services in one component can sometimes be used very effectively in another. Assistive technologies, such as adaptive screens, fall under accommodation, but in some situations they can be used successfully to prevent serious illness and injury in the first place, or to prevent a relapse for employees who have returned to work to help them stay at work.

II. Case Management

Case management is a goal-oriented approach that aims to help employees remain at work and facilitate a safe and timely return to work. It is best accomplished with a multidisciplinary team.

At the heart of case management is a dedicated resource, such as a disability management advisor, who coordinates discussions between the employee, the manager and all partners in the process. Working collaboratively with the employee and the manager, this resource person ensures that any work-related functional limitations or restrictions are identified and incorporated into a remain-at-work or return-to-work plan. The ideal outcome is for appropriate accommodations to help an employee remain at work or facilitate a safe and timely return to work.

Case management is not always required, for example, if the accommodations are simple and straightforward. A manager can make arrangements on an informal basis, purchasing adaptive equipment or making work schedule adjustments or space allocations. However, in more complex cases, an interdisciplinary team is beneficial, and the case management model provides structure. In all instances, document the arrangements made.

The employee is responsible for providing the manager with medical information specifying work-related capabilities, functional limitations and restrictions that might be required for accommodation within the workplace. A remain-at-work or return-to-work plan will need to be agreed upon by both the employee and manager. Successful outcomes need early intervention and effective case management, including:

- Case definition/profile;
- Case analysis;
- Understanding of the shared responsibilities of the employee and the manager to actively communicate;
- Timely decisions on benefits: eligibility and entitlement;
- Efficient, accurate and timely administration of claims;
- Integrated teams to identify and manage workplace issues in a coordinated manner; and
- Proactive discussions.

III. Promising Practices

Correctional Service Canada (CSC)

The CSC has a graduated case management approach with joint case discussions. The process begins at the work site and then, if employees have not returned to work after a 6-month absence, the case is reviewed regionally. Nationally, the Committee members meet on average 6 times per year, reviewing cases of correctional officers who are away for more than 1 year; they review about 100 cases annually. Its National Joint Return-to-Work Advisory Committee, which includes union partners, meets twice per year to discuss general return-to-work issues, trends, and associated issues. The CSC also has joint case discussions with union representatives.

Guiding Principles Of A Disability Management Program

- Committed Integration;
- Engaged Employees;
- Proactive Management;
- Effective Communication; And
- Protection Of Privacy.

How To Build A Disability Management Program

Disability management is most successful when it promotes respect and cooperation among employees, unions and the employer. Designing and implementing a Disability Management Program makes good management sense.

- ❖ Obtaining Commitment;
- ❖ Obtaining An Assessment;
- ❖ Obtaining Resources;
- ❖ Developing A Framework;
- ❖ Building A Collaborative Team-Based Management;

- ❖ Building Capacity Through Training And Awareness; And
- ❖ Measuring Results.

IV. The Role Managers Play In The Disability Management System

Line managers are critical players in all workplace disability management systems. They are the people who, on a daily basis, match employees to tasks, assign and lead work, and evaluate work performance. In addition to business and technical skills, successful managers have strong relationship or “people” skills—the ability to motivate and listen to, empathize with and support people constructively. These skills are integral to effective disability management. Managers certainly need to know the business rules and policies they must adhere to in managing cases of employee illness and injury. However, it is their people management skills that make the difference in creating a healthy and productive workplace, encouraging employees to maintain their health and well-being, and supporting employees in their recovery from illness or injury to increase the likelihood that they can stay at work or successfully return to work.

Manager is responsible for ensuring a healthy and safe workplace. When employees experience serious illness or injury, manager role is to make sure they get the support they need and are entitled to. To fulfil these responsibilities, manager must be aware of and engaged in efforts to promote and support workplace wellness, and you must stay in touch with ill or injured employees.

V. How You Stay In Touch Is Up To You And The Ill Or Injured employee

Contact can range from periodic phone calls to informal meetings, depending on the circumstances. Staying in touch allows you to keep the ill or injured employee informed about what is happening at work. It shows that you care, and reminds the employee that he or she is missed and matters to you and the rest of the team. Last, but not least, it allows you to make sure the employee is getting the support he or she needs and is entitled to, and to intervene if there are problems.

Manager is responsible for doing everything to the point of undue hardship to help ill or injured employees remain at work if they are able and to return to work when they are ready, even in cases where they cannot return to their previous position or to a position in your department or agency. Manager’s responsibility to these employees continues for as long as they are absent from the workplace until one of two things happens:

- They are hired in a new position and report to a new manager; or
- They cease to be employed because they have resigned or retired for medical reasons, or their employment has been terminated for medical incapacity (i.e., they have been found unable to return to work for the foreseeable future by a competent medical authority).

Basic Managing Principles For Employee Health And Well-Being

- Be proactive about supporting your employees in maintaining their health and well-being.
- Keep the health of your entire team uppermost in mind.
- In Canada, under federal and provincial privacy laws, personal medical information is private, and individuals have the right to control who has access to it.
- In the workplace, respecting the confidentiality of medical information is essential for effective disability management
- In terms of prevention, in certain situations employees are obliged to disclose personal medical information.

Disability Management; Employess Wellness Resource

As a federal public service employee, you share a responsibility with your employer to protect and support health and safety. You are responsible for taking care of your health; your employer has an obligation to ensure a safe workplace. It is in everyone's interests to promote healthy workplace practices that help all employees perform their work to the best of their ability.

This resource highlights the benefits and services available to help you stay physically and mentally healthy and the supports that are available if an illness or injury occurs. It outlines:

- What to expect from your employer to help you stay healthy;

- Who the key players are;
- Where to get support;
- What you need to do; and
- Where to go to get more information.

VI. Staying Healthy

The most important thing you can do to protect yourself against illness or injury is to take care of your health. Your employer encourages you to be proactive about protecting your physical and mental health.

- Learn how to use the tools of your trade in a safe and efficient manner. Whether you use a mouse or a drill, sit for most of the day or lift heavy objects, make sure you use safe work practices and that you are aware of the potential hazards in your work environment. If you have concerns, speak to your supervisor.
- Let your employer know as soon as possible if, due to medical reasons, you need special equipment or any other accommodation to work effectively and comfortably—your supervisor will work with you to get the accommodations you need. Your supervisor may ask you to provide documentation from your physician to support the request.
- You are encouraged to go for your annual medical and dental checkups. Check your workplace policies and your collective agreement for information for leave to attend these appointments.
- Don't wait to seek help for yourself or for your family. Support services are provided through the Employee Assistance Program.
- Look for training on health, safety and wellness issues that is relevant to your work and discuss this with your supervisor. Include this in your learning plan.

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