



A Clarian Health Partner  
Health & Productivity Management  
Workforce Tip – December 2008

**Industrial Physical Therapy – Early intervention provides a speedy return to full duty**

What can our company do to further reduce expenses related to workers compensation injuries? If you have ever asked (or have ever been asked) that question, this article is for you. To answer the question, there are a number of different things that can be done, and early or immediate use of physical therapy (PT) is one of them. Starting PT within 24 to 48 hrs after an injury can significantly improve the resolution of a musculoskeletal strain. Published research on early PT intervention for occupational musculoskeletal injuries has shown significant benefits to employers and employees<sup>1</sup>. Waiting greater than 7 days on the other hand reveals substantially poorer outcomes both physically and financially.

According to published research, the benefits of starting immediate Physical Therapy after a back injury include:

- Faster return to work
- Reduced physician visits
- Reduced number of cases involving an attorney
- Reduced physical and/or occupational therapy visits
- Quicker return to normal productivity
- More positive employee morale as it demonstrates employer concern
- Provides positive modification of work habits to prevent reoccurrences
- Subsequently reduced medical costs (present and future)

The physical therapist is an integral member of the team which may also include the employer representative, the physician, the employee, employee's supervisor, case manager, and insurance company. The employee should understand his or her responsibility to work at getting better. At times this is a painful process however it has been found that **early return to work provides a quicker and more satisfactory return to full capacity**. Another benefit to early PT intervention is the therapist's ability to spend time with the employee and identify physical and personal barriers to successful resolution as well as the possible need for other referrals.

The components of a good industrial physical therapy program include but are not limited to:

- The therapist having specific knowledge of the employee's work activity, tools, equipment, company policies, procedures, and culture
- Therapist is knowledgeable in the treatment of acute industrial musculoskeletal disorders
- Therapist must be able to motivate and encourage the employee to provide "best effort"
- Therapist is familiar with non-organic signs and testing for their presence
- Therapist is able to simulate work activities in the clinic setting
- Therapist must be able to coach the employee in safe work activities upon return to work
- Frequent, timely, and thorough communication between all team members

When these qualities are present, giving an "evaluate and treat" order to your occ-health clinic will allow the therapist to design a treatment plan that will be efficient and tailored to the employees' needs, thus allowing them to return to work quickly and safely. **Physical therapy services may be provided in the clinic or on-site at the company**. An on-site service allows for greater control of the employee's time away from the job and allows the therapist to have full access to observe work activities, tools, and equipment. Supervisory and other management personnel are more readily available to assist in solving administrative questions that may arise.

Please contact us at 219-851-3827 if you would like to establish an "evaluate and treat" order with our physicians and therapists. We welcome any questions that you may have about this process.

<sup>1</sup> Published *National Underwriter, Property & Casualty / Risk & Benefits Management Edition, August 12, 2002.*