

# Return to work management –

*The missing piece of the cost containment puzzle*

The California State University  
FITTING THE PIECES TOGETHER CONFERENCE

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# Objectives

- Identify the key elements necessary to support a successful RTW program
- Review how to develop those elements that are not currently available
- Discuss business challenges that delay RTW
- Outline strategies to overcome these challenges
- Creative solutions to reduce the time necessary to foster a return to work/remain at work culture
- Discuss how to efficiently develop or transform your current RTW process

# Key elements for a successful RTW program:

## ORGANIZATIONAL

- 1) Global RTW policy
- 2) Sets RTW vision & culture
- 3) Integrated strategy or specific by claim type? (WC/disability)
- 4) Delineate division/dept. options vs. issues that require escalation
- 5) Determination of RTW data elements for aggregate metrics
- 6) Job descriptions with essential functions and physical demands per task
- 7) Set a best practice standard that fosters consistency
- 8) Analyze RTW data and use outcomes of successful locations to promote progress in those that need assistance

## DIVISION/DEPARTMENT

- 1) Evaluate CBAs, if applicable, to identify variances to the global RTW policy
- 2) Delineate location-specific options vs those that require escalation to div. or dept.
- 3) Identify temporary task lists with physical demands
- 4) Ensure all training, RTW processes, and daily coordination support the organization's RTW culture
- 5) Develop reference material that enables location personnel to act easily and efficiently
- 6) Cross-train RTW leaders and assess cross departmental RTW opportunities, if possible
- 7) Capture RTW data & measure outcomes

## LOCATION

- 1) Promote creative limited duty task identification
- 2) Understand and adhere to policy or CBA limited duty timeframes
- 3) Escalate questions or unique scenarios to div./dept. contacts
- 4) Ensure employee adheres to tasks that are within their restrictions
- 5) Ensure every manager and employee understands that safe RTW/remain at work is the goal
- 6) Use reference material to act easily and efficiently
- 7) Embrace interdepartmental limited duty opportunities, if permitted
- 8) Capture RTW data

# Key elements for a successful RTW program:

## *RTW Checklist*

- RTW policy for occupational claims
- RTW policy for non-occupational disability claims
- Job descriptions with essential functions & physical demands per task
- CBA limited duty language (Reference variances to the policy)
- Best practice standards that foster consistency
- Temporary task lists (Current, complete & must include physical demands of each task)
- RTW data elements (Consistent and Well-Defined)
- Reference material for location personnel
- Understand interdepartmental RTW options
- RTW outcome analysis (Internal and/or from vendor partners)
- Affirm ADA accommodation reviews intersect with RTW protocol, as appropriate
- Periodic review/update of policies, job analyses, CBAs & associated documents

## Business challenges that delay RTW:

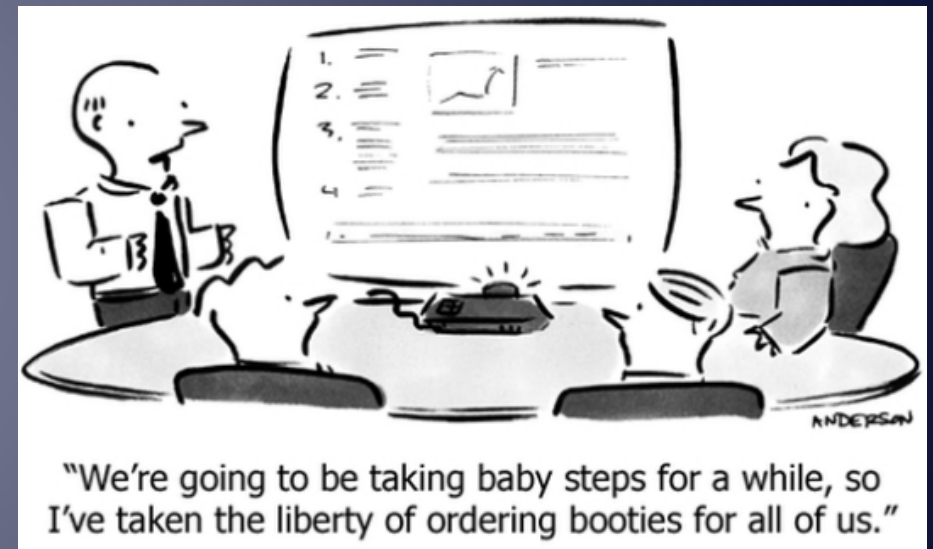
- Inefficient or inconsistent methods for identifying safe limited duty tasks
- Absence of functional requirements of each task noted in the job description
- Absence of limited duty task list
- Cumbersome job offer letters
- Location personnel view limited duty as a burden they don't have the time or resources to oversee
- Processes that do not promote collaboration between internal teams and/or vendor partners – teamwork counts!

## Business challenges that delay RTW:

- Internal confusion concerning the process that needs to be followed;
  - Occupational vs. Non-occupational claims,
  - Accommodation requests vs Work release with restrictions
  - Inconsistencies between Corporate policy/ies & Labor Agreements
- Policies that dictate RTW may only occur if provider affirms full duty will occur within “X” weeks
- Excessive use of optional Fitness for Duty Exams
- Any step in the RTW process that requires provider clarification via regular mail

## Strategies to overcome these challenges:

- Most of the following options are not time consuming to develop and do not require a capital investment
- Leverage internal stakeholders, vendor partners and subject matter experts where possible
- Develop a list of short-term and longer-term initiatives that are realistic and achievable
- Progressive improvement is key.... there really is no 'final' RTW destination



# Strategies to overcome these challenges:

CHALLENGE	STRATEGIES FOR CONSIDERATION
<p>Inefficient or inconsistent method(s) for identifying safe limited duty tasks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure task lists are as thorough as possible and easily accessible</li> <li>• Add new tasks as work processes are updated or expanded</li> <li>• Identify an internal or vendor-supplied resource to ‘match’ the restrictions to the limited duty task list</li> <li>• Develop an interactive tool to foster this process</li> <li>• Move away from limited duty ‘position(s)’ and promote the identification of <u>tasks</u> that operational managers can select from based on daily business need</li> <li>• Share limited duty task lists across departments/campuses where possible</li> <li>• Stress that limited duty must be equally considered for the best as well as the most challenging employee, consistency counts!</li> <li>• Consider escalating limited duty requests to a specific resource if tasks are not identified within “X” business day(s) of receiving restrictions</li> </ul>
<p>Absence of functional requirements of each task noted in the job description</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If existing job restrictions do not detail the functional requirements of each essential function, consider adding this specificity on a gradual basis- start with job titles with higher claim frequency</li> <li>• Can be done as a claim cost under a current active claim per job title</li> <li>• Share job descriptions where possible</li> <li>• Utilize internal resources to enhance the existing content, if available</li> </ul>



# Strategies to overcome these challenges:

CHALLENGE	STRATEGIES FOR CONSIDERATION
<p>Absence of limited duty task list per department, division or location</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Think outside the box’- be creative and look for meaningful activity</li> <li>• Consider tasks that occur on an ad hoc or ‘as time permits’ basis</li> <li>• Include tasks performed virtually, if appropriate</li> <li>• Include interdepartmental tasks, if permitted</li> <li>• Share limited duty task lists across departments/campuses where possible</li> </ul>
<p>Cumbersome job offer letters</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review existing format and streamline where possible</li> <li>• Eliminate unnecessary text</li> <li>• Adopt a format that allows copy/paste and/or fill in the blank formats that are easy to complete</li> <li>• Ensure letters are customized to adhere to jurisdictional requirements and have been approved by legal team</li> </ul>
<p>Location personnel view limited duty as a burden they don’t have the time or resources to oversee</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider integrated policies that allow location personnel to follow the same process for occ and non-occ claims, wherever possible</li> <li>• Identify options to lessen or eliminate the amount of coordination or oversight that needs to be performed by operational managers</li> <li>• Remove the barriers that drive limited duty refusals</li> <li>• If a location declines limited duty, capture the reason for refusal – this information provides information that helps to enhance the program further</li> </ul>

# Strategies to overcome these challenges:

CHALLENGE	STRATEGIES FOR CONSIDERATION
<p>Processes do not promote collaboration between internal teams and/or vendor partners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate current workflows to identify meaningful opportunities for collaboration</li> <li>• Make sure every vendor understands their obligation to work together to benefit the organization</li> <li>• Consider how information can be shared whenever possible and appropriate to expedite services for each employee</li> <li>• Ensure all vendors have access to current reference documents, including job descriptions that include physical demands and temp. task lists</li> </ul>
<p>Internal confusion concerning the process that needs to be followed;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occ vs. non-occ claims ADA accommodation req. vs work release with restrictions</li> <li>• Corporate policy vs &amp; CBAs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review existing processes and streamline/unify where possible</li> <li>• Create handy reference sheets that are available via a shared folder, internal portal or Intranet</li> <li>• Promote efficiencies where the internal team(s) and/or external vendors who administer these programs share information with one another to limit the quantity of recipients the employee or their direct operational manager is required to maneuver</li> <li>• Survey employees with claims and their direct managers to obtain feedback concerning what is working well (process is simple, easy, etc.) and what needs improvement. Continue to foster the processes that work well and adjust those that require improvement.</li> </ul>

# Strategies to overcome these challenges:

CHALLENGE	STRATEGIES FOR CONSIDERATION
<p>Policies that dictate “RTW may only occur if provider affirms full duty will occur within ‘X’ weeks”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consider removing language of this nature if possible- it drives more lost time prior to a RTW with no guarantee that the available period of limited duty will be sufficient.</li><li>• If the policy or CBA is unable to be changed, determine if the full duty RTW guideline under ODG (Official Disability Guidelines) may be used as an alternative. This is an immediate resource that contemplates national RTW data and might eliminate the need to wait for a provider’s response.</li><li>• Consider adopting a new approach to this scenario- Instead of delaying a RTW until a medical provider affirms full duty is expected by a specific date, assume the employee will be able to progress to full duty within the limits of your Limited Duty Policy.</li><li>• If the amount of limited duty is insufficient to achieve full duty, consider a temporary extension under ADA (if possible &amp; full duty is imminent) or determine if the employee’s restrictions are permanent in nature and handle accordingly.</li></ul>

# Strategies to overcome these challenges:

CHALLENGE	STRATEGIES FOR CONSIDERATION
Excessive use of optional fitness for duty exams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use restraint when considering a discretionary fitness for duty (FFD) Exam- employers find themselves in a quandary when the employee's own provider has released them to work and the employer's examiner deems the employee unable to work. (incurs cost, adds indemnity and are often left to coordinate another exam to serve as a tie-breaker.</li><li>• Consider a safe RTW within the restrictions denoted by the employee's provider and if issues arise, evaluate options while the employee remains actively on the job.</li></ul>
Any step in the RTW process that requires provider clarification via regular mail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Evaluate existing internal and vendor related workflows to identify decision points related to a RTW that denote written correspondence to/from the provider must occur.</li><li>• Determine if the correspondence is truly necessary and if so, opt for a more immediate method of communication. (E-mail, fax or possibly a virtual discussion are all viable alternatives and can often reduce lost time by several days or more.</li></ul>

# Solutions to foster a Return to Work / Remain at Work culture:

- Ensure executive leadership support exists
- Start with the teams closest to the daily handling of claims and accommodation requests (internal and vendor supplied services) and set clear and consistent goals
- Review existing metrics (if available) to determine;
  - Those locations / job groups who already embrace this philosophy and actively recognize their achievements
  - Those locations / job groups who require improvement and engage in discussions to identify any gaps in awareness or barriers they are encountering in the process
    - The issue(s) will not always be the same for every location / job group, so flexibility is vital
    - Most issues will resolve more quickly if there is a unified and transparent approach.
    - RTW engagement should not be a negative or punitive topic and organizations with the most flexible and collaborative business partners typically enjoy the most successful outcomes

Remember:



**KEEP  
CALM**

AND

**PROMOTE  
RTW**

# Transform your current RTW program:

*How do we get from where we are to where we want to be?*

- Evaluate the current program and identify the most immediate gaps, cost drivers or pain points
- Engage internal and/or vendor related subject matter experts to collaborate and define short and long-term options to mitigate these challenges
- If 1 or more challenges are more costly or require excessive resources beyond what is available, consider a pilot with a smaller group to move forward in a meaningful way



# Transform your current RTW program:

*How do we get from where we are to where we want to be?*

- Once the scope is defined, leverage all necessary stakeholders to communicate the challenge(s), upcoming changes and define the roles and responsibilities of all participants
- Selecting stakeholders who will promote change in a positive way is key!
- Ensure there is a mechanism in place to capture information so improvements can be adequately measured and assessed
- Part of the fun is determining what updates make a positive difference and which do not – adapt as needed, where needed
- Celebrate successes along the way – RTW Management is a journey, not a destination



**THANK**

*Questions?*

**YOU**