

RTW OR RETURN-TO-WHAT?

As an Attending Physician you are not expected to identify tasks or design work duties for a RTW plan. This is a team effort made up of WCB staff working with the employer, with your input. As the Attending Physician you can assist in advising the team in RTW by initiating the question, “Return-to-What?” The “what” refers to appropriate job tasks based on your patient’s capabilities, recommended physical activities, and medical restrictions. The RTW process allows physicians to make medical decisions and employers to make employment decisions.

WCB SUPPORTS YOUR EFFORTS

WCB has introduced Fee Item #19950 “RTW Consultation” for you to facilitate a safe and early RTW for your patient. You can proceed with a RTW consultation following an injured worker’s initial visit to your office by:

- Obtaining Board Officer approval for the consultation process (please contact your local Medical Advisor)
- Discussing RTW with the employer
- Having a second office visit with your patient to discuss the RTW plan

The consultation and RTW plan must be documented and submitted on **Form 11**.

RTW IS GOOD MEDICINE

WCB understands that you consider the whole person when making your decision about whether your patient should return to work, about when your patient should return to work, and under what conditions that should occur. In many cases, a modified RTW plan is consistent with the physical, emotional, and social well being of your patient. The **work as therapy** philosophy gives Attending Physicians an effective treatment option. When it is an appropriate option for your patient, WCB is ready to assist you in its implementation.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Interior and B.C. Northern Call Centre

Phone 250 717-4301, Toll free 1 888 922-6622

Lower Mainland, Vancouver Island, and Terrace Call Centre

Phone 604 231-8888, Toll free 1 888 967-5377

If you are a worker, please direct your correspondence to:

PO Box 4700 Stn Terminal
Vancouver BC V6B 1J1
Toll free fax 1 888 922-8807
Greater Vancouver fax 604 233-9777

If you are a physician, please direct your correspondence to:

PO Box 94460 Stn Main
Richmond BC V6Y 2V6
Toll free fax 1 888 922-3299
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Visit the WCB web site at www.WorkSafebc.com for more information.

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WORKERS' COMPENSATION BOARD OF BC

RETURN TO WORK IS GOOD MEDICINE



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www.WorkSafebc.com



A CHANGING APPROACH TO RETURN TO WORK

Until recently in British Columbia, as a physician your decisions about the return to work (RTW) of your patients were often limited — either the patient could return to full duty or they could not return to full duty. Employers used to offer patients little in the way of modified return-to-work opportunities. Today there are significant changes in RTW thinking on the part of employers, labour, the WCB, and medical and rehabilitation health care professionals. Many employers are initiating systematic “remain at work” and RTW programs for injured employees. The most progressive programs see the RTW process as a tool for the physician to use in their medical treatment plan. In short, RTW becomes a form of “therapy.” The RTW process ensures that physicians make medical decisions while employers make employment decisions.

WORK AS THERAPY

RTW programs are based on the philosophy that many patients can safely perform productive work during the process of recovery. Patient understanding and confidence in the philosophy of “**work as therapy**” is an essential element of RTW success. You can increase the effectiveness of RTW efforts by counselling your patients on the benefits and expected results of the RTW plan. A patient’s understanding of and attitude towards any treatment plan can affect outcomes. **Work as therapy** is no different — your patient stands to benefit physically, emotionally, and socially. RTW programs help your patient recover more rapidly and more completely.

BENEFITS

The use of **work as therapy** benefits everyone in the workers’ compensation system.

- It benefits employees by helping them to recover more rapidly and more completely.
- It benefits the employer by returning a valuable employee to work.
- It benefits you by providing a therapeutic intervention where treatment options have been limited. The WCB recognizes your participation in the RTW process by providing a fee for service.

ATTENDING PHYSICIAN’S ROLE

You are the one who sets the patient’s expectations about time-loss. As an attending physician you are often asked to facilitate the remain-at-work process by providing RTW planning. You may also be asked to approve your patient’s participation in proposed short-term, modified duties.

HOW TO FACILITATE THE RTW PROCESS

Communicate

Find an effective, easy way to let a patient (and his/her employer) know when he/she can return to work, and under what conditions. When your patient cannot yet return to work, it is helpful to explain to everyone why this is the case. It is also helpful to identify when (or if) you believe the worker’s condition will improve sufficiently to allow the patient to participate in a RTW program.

Use work as an extension of medical treatment

Much like physical therapy or work conditioning, placing a recovering patient into physically suitable safe work can help your patient maintain his/her physical conditioning. It can also have significant biopsychosocial benefits for the patient. In addition to those benefits, RTW helps maintain the employee/employer relationship that is vital to the employee’s ongoing success in the workplace.

Establish timelines

Establishing a timeline sets an expectation of recovery times. This assists the employer in developing a safe and productive RTW program for your patient. The two most important timelines are:

- The earliest date your patient can safely return to alternate modified duties
- The date your patient can safely resume his/her full duties

Capabilities

An effective prescription for safe RTW is to focus on the individual’s capabilities. Objective medical limitations should be restricted only to the anatomical area of injury. In spite of injuries, workers continue to have many other abilities. To safely assign work activities however, a good description of the claim related physical and/or psychological restrictions are required. It is important that your patient (and their employer) understand what work duties can and cannot be safely performed. Employers are much more likely to identify suitable work for your patient when they consider the patient’s abilities rather than their restrictions.

