

5 Things You Need To Know About Return To Work

by Mark Stipic



Introduction

Working in Return To Work (RTW) can be tough

Every case is different. Many are complex.

It's practically impossible to *control* RTW outcomes but you certainly can *influence* them.

To be influential, it helps to have a degree of knowledge and expertise. In fact, if you intend to grow a career in this field (or any field) **it's not enough to just turn up** and do your job each day, expecting to be rewarded with a promotion or a pay rise.

You must constantly develop your skills and knowledge in a structured fashion. Train like you're preparing for a sporting match. Spend at least 15 minutes every day to **improve the areas you're currently deficient in**. These could include time management, stress management, technical knowledge, growing your network and more.

In the pages that follow I've rounded up **5 Things You Need To Know About Return To Work**. Each one is based on some sort of learning material I've encountered during my own structured learning process.

I want you to take 1 thing from this book:

Use this information to improve your knowledge and the quality of your conversations in RTW

1: Work is good for your health



Yep. Work is good for you. Although maybe it's actually more accurate to say "being off work is bad for your health".

Being at work helps you avoid the health consequences of unemployment so, as a preventative measure, the assertion in my chosen title holds up.

This is so widely recognised now that I contemplated leaving it off the list. But in the event you are yet to be convinced, here are some things you should know.

Health benefits of work

- ☐ Ensuring that some physical activity is undertaken
- ☐ Providing a sense of community and social inclusion
- ☐ Allowing workers to feel that they are making a contribution to society and their family
- ☐ Giving structure to days and weeks
- ☐ Financial security
- ☐ A decreased likelihood that individuals will engage in risky behaviours, such as excessive drinking

Health risks of unemployment

- ☐ If you are off work for 70 days you only have a 35% chance of ever getting back to work
- ☐ Increased rates of overall mortality including suicide
- ☐ Poorer physical health
- ☐ Poorer mental health and psychological well-being

Added risk to children of unemployed people

- ☐ A higher likelihood of chronic illnesses, psychosomatic symptoms and lower wellbeing for children in families where neither parent has worked in the previous six months;
- ☐ Children living in households where the parents are not working are more likely in the future to be out of work themselves; and
- ☐ Psychological distress may occur in children whose parents face increased economic pressure

Source: [Australian & New Zealand Consensus Statement on the Health Benefits of Work, RACP](#)

2: Compensation claims are bad for your health

Have you ever stopped to think about the health consequences that come along with entering into a compensation scheme?

By understanding the stress that comes along with a claim you can begin to help by offering better access to information and providing support with difficult processes.



There is a growing body of evidence that people recover faster when they do not have a compensable claim.

A 2013 study titled **The Health Effects of Compensation Systems (HECS) Study** by the Institute for Safety Compensation and Recovery Research found that:

- 53% of claimants reported moderate-to-high levels of stress associated with the claims experience
- Claimants who reported high levels of claim-related stress were at heightened risk of poor long-term recovery

The most frequently-reported stressors were:

- understanding what the claimant needed to do for the claim (34% of claimants)
- the amount of time taken to deal with the claim (30% of claimants), and
- the number of medical assessments or examinations (27% of claimants)

3: Doctors are very important

But they need your support



Doctors are central to an injured worker's experience. They are frequently a worker's first contact with a workers compensation system.

Around **96% of claimants** make the decision to lodge a workers compensation claim in the presence of their General Practitioner (GP).

Treat doctors with respect. Be mindful that workers comp matters tend to be more complicated work for them, with many added tasks that go **unpaid**.

What GPs say

"I see that I'm an advocate for the patient and I'm also basically mostly trying to concentrate on treating their actual medical problem or the injury." - 47 year old female GP

"The heart-sink patients are patients – the WorkCover ones – that make us all shudder there's all this conflict between the insurance company itself, the employer, the patient [and] we are stuck in the middle." - 37 year old female GP

"It wouldn't hurt us to occasionally go to a meeting bringing us up to speed on work cover legislation. I think the more confident you are in handling the whole system, the more confident you are ringing up an employer and talking about it if you know where you stand." - 62 year old male GP

What the numbers say

- ☐ 74% of initial certificates are unfit for work
- ☐ 94% of patients with a mental health condition will initially be certified unfit for work

Some of the barriers faced by GPs

- ☐ Finding specialists for referral
- ☐ Conflicting medical opinions (GP vs Independent Medical Examiner)
- ☐ GP's lack of understanding of how the system works
- ☐ High turnover of staff at the insurer
- ☐ Delays in approving payment for treatment
- ☐ GPs feel they are not adequately remunerated for time and effort
- ☐ GP refusal to treat workers compensation patients

Source: [Australian Perspectives on the GPs Role in Return To Work: Results of Recent Research](#)

4: Leading indicators can predict risk of future injuries

Lagging Indicators

Many businesses make the mistake of only measuring Lagging Indicators to assess their safety and injury management performance.

Lagging Indicators measure past performance. Examples include:

- Lost Time Injury (LTI) frequency
- Hazard reports and near misses
- Workers compensation premium and claims costs

Lagging Indicators are still important because they illustrate the *outcomes* or *benefits* of your preventative strategies. But knowing how many LTIs you had last month won't always help you prevent them next month.

Leading Indicators

These measure organisational characteristics known to correlate with reduced injury rates and shorter duration of time off work following injury or illness.

Leading Indicators can predict future performance. Examples include:

- Employee engagement
- Attitudes to safety
- Commitment to workplace rehabilitation

Source: [Measuring the Impact of Organizational Behaviors on Work Disability Prevention and Management](#)

Ask these sort of questions:

Employee Engagement

- ☐ Does the company involve employees in plans and decisions?
- ☐ Do workers have trust in the company?

Safety Climate

- ☐ Is top management actively involved in the safety program?
- ☐ Is safety just as important to us as meeting deadlines and quality targets?

Job Compatibility

- ☐ Are jobs designed to avoid heavy lifting?
- ☐ Is the work repetitive?

Injury Management

- ☐ Do we make accommodations to get people back on light duties?
- ☐ Do we redeploy people if they can't return to their pre-injury role?

5: Recovery expectations are a great predictor of future time loss

Want to know when someone will come back to work?

Ask them!



There are plenty of factors that can influence recovery post-injury. Everything from diagnosis to family support, gender, geographic location and many more.

With so many variables, how are we supposed to know when someone will come back to work?

Fortunately, the answer is simple:

Ask the worker.

One of the strongest predictors of recovery timeframes is the worker's own expectation. Simply put, people are either very honest or very accurate.

Ask people when they expect to be back at work. If they say "*never*" or "*I don't know*" then you need to act. Never dismiss the worker's comments. Work with them on motivation and goal-setting.

Source: [Canadian Chiropractor](#), June 2016

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Thanks for reading, I hope it's been helpful!

Working in the field of RTW, safety and rehabilitation is a unique opportunity for you to have a profound impact on the lives of others. Take the information in this eBook and go get some great RTW outcomes.

Make sure you check out my podcast [RTW Nation](#) as well as over 100 educational videos I published on my [YouTube channel](#).

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