



The Rehab Review

Issue 4, 2008

Welcome...

This edition of The Rehab Review features information on the use of Notices of Further Consideration (Health Reasons) to risk manage the re-employment of employees, a Principal's perspective of the benefits of having an on-site Rehabilitation and Return to Work Coordinator (RRTWC), an employee's rehabilitation experience, advice for selecting

a RRTWC and some useful resources. Our frequently asked question explains the role of Medical Assessment Tribunals (MATs) in the WorkCover claim process.

If you have any feedback on The Rehab Review or would like to contribute an article, please contact Michelle Hilhorst on 323 70789 or by email at michelle.hilhorst@detqld.gov.au.

A Principal's Perspective on Having a RRTWC

How schools operate without an onsite RRTWC is difficult to imagine, according to Diane Hicks, Principal of Sunnybank State High School. As stated by Diane, "the benefits are significant and that's not only for the Principal!"

When an employee is injured, the early assurance and contact with the RRTWC and explanation of the processes involved in rehabilitation and return to work can immediately set the injured employee's mind at rest and provide confidence that they are supported. Having the RRTWC onsite ensures that this is able to happen with greater ease than needing to call in someone from offsite.

The collegial knowledge of the employee and details of leave, work practices, previous incidents, work roles, employee skills and other onsite knowledge can assist in the accurate processing of the required documents in a timely and appropriate fashion. All of this is enhanced by the onsite RRTWC's established relationship with staff and knowledge of support mechanisms unique to the school.

Knowledge of the injured employee's personality and demeanour may assist in establishing appropriate support mechanisms to prevent secondary issues emerging. Ease of meeting, whilst a seemingly minor issue, can assist the process significantly with less complication for the transfer of documentation and the provision of accurate information between all the various parties involved in the rehabilitation process. Overseeing and monitoring the daily work processes and plans is undertaken with less stress for all concerned.

Having an onsite RRTWC who can work proactively with staff and Workplace Health and Safety Officers (WHSOs) in the prevention of injuries and identification of risks is a significant asset. Offering regular professional development and information sessions for staff is also a major advantage.

In all, an onsite RRTWC helps establish the positive environment and relationships that all Principals want within their school.

Selecting a RRTWC

Rehabilitation and Return to Work Coordinators (RRTWC) co-ordinate the rehabilitation of employees recovering from injury or illness, in consultation with treating medical practitioners, the manager, the injured employee, and relevant insurers, eg WorkCover or QSuper.

To achieve the best results with workplace rehabilitation, it is important to identify the right person to perform the role of RRTWC. Ideally this person will:

- Have good standing within the workplace and the authority to effectively deal with issues regarding rehabilitation and return to work;
- Have good written and verbal communication skills;
- Have a good understanding of the local work practices, job descriptions and culture;
- Have support of management, unions & employees;
- Be interested in and committed to workplace rehabilitation; and
- Have adequate time and resources to effectively carry out the role.

Did you know that you can share a Rehabilitation and Return to Work Coordinator?

Under the department's rehabilitation policy, an accredited RRTWC is required to be attached to each workplace. While large schools may have many rehabilitation cases to manage and benefit from more than one staff member being trained as a RRTWC, small schools have the option to cluster with nearby schools or with a larger nearby school to share a RRTWC.

In this way, the RRTWCs are likely to experience more regular case management to keep their skills current and provide an important service for injured employees and Principals.

A template for sharing a RRTWC between schools is available on the Creating Healthier Workplaces website at www.education.qld.gov.au/health/docs/rehab/rehab-rtw-sharing-agreement-template.doc.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the role of the Medical Assessment Tribunals (MATs) ?

Medical Assessment Tribunals are coordinated by Q-COMP, the Queensland Workers' Compensation regulator, to provide independent medical evaluations of employees with WorkCover claims. The tribunals generally consist of three medical specialists (up to five for composite tribunals) who are experts in their chosen medical fields.

They provide a fair and independent assessment of complex workers' compensation medical matters. The tribunal members make a collective decision about an employee's injury based on a clinical examination, information from the employee's claim file supplied by WorkCover and additional

information provided by the employee or their representative.

Only WorkCover may refer an employee to a tribunal. The majority of matters referred to a tribunal relate to:

- Conflicting medical opinions about whether the injury is work-related;
- A claim previously accepted by WorkCover, but with uncertainty about whether there is any ongoing incapacity from the work-related injury;
- Assessing the degree of permanent impairment resulting from a work-related injury.

An Employee's Rehab Experience

Ms Renae McKenna is a Year One Teacher at Strathpine West State School, who shares with us her rehabilitation experience.

"In July 2007, I was diagnosed with breast cancer for the second time and, as you can imagine, I was very distraught by the diagnosis.

I had wonderful support from the administration and staff at the school. I also had the support and guidance from the school's Business Services Manager who was also the Rehabilitation and Return to Work Coordinator (RRTWC).

I relied heavily on the RRTWC to help me keep on top of all of the paperwork required whilst I was on leave and on my return to work. It was an extremely stressful 12 months with operations and chemotherapy. However, I did not have to worry about anything to do with District Office or QSuper as I knew my RRTWC had it all under control. She was a strong voice for my return to work; ensuring my health and well being was paramount.

Having a RRTWC on the school site is a wonderful initiative and one I would recommend for any workplace".

Useful Resources

A new checklist of the rehabilitation roles and responsibilities of Principals and RRTWCs has been launched on the Creating Healthier Workplaces website at <http://education.qld.gov.au/health/pdfs/rehab/rrtwc-principal-checklist.pdf>.

The Queensland College of Teachers (QCOT) has developed a new DVD Resource on Teachers' Wellbeing, which is being distributed to all schools. For further information see their website at: <http://www.qct.edu.au/>.

An online resource called RTW Matters can be accessed free of charge until 1 December 2008. The website contains news, case studies, presentations and other resources for individuals involved in coordinating rehabilitation. You can access the website at: <http://www.rtwmatters.com/>.

Notice of Further Consideration (Health Reasons)

A Notice of Further Consideration (Health Reasons) is an internal departmental mechanism to manage re-employment applications by former employees, following their separation due to ill health.

The notice does not prevent an applicant from gaining re-employment with the department, however, it does require that applicants undergo appropriate reviews prior to re-employment. This may include undergoing a medical assessment, paid for by the applicant, to determine if their health status continues to impact on their capacity to perform work safely.

This process ensures that the department meets its workplace health and safety obligations and will not be placing employees, students or others at a risk of injury.

A Notice of Further Consideration (Health Reasons) is automatically placed on the electronic record of an employee if they are ill health retired from the department. Notices are also placed on the electronic record of employees who resign from the department and state "ill health" or "health reasons" on their Notice of Intention to Cease Employment form. Notices may also be placed on the electronic record of employees who, prior to resignation, have long periods of sick leave, but do not indicate "ill health" or "health reasons" on their Notice of Intention to Cease Employment form.

Central Office, Regional Office and Tracer staff have access to these electronic records. Tracer ensures that all teaching staff they coordinate have the appropriate clearances.

Schools do not have access to these records and, because employment decisions for relief staff are made locally, schools should check with their Regional Office before they engage employees, to ensure that a Notice of Further Consideration (Health Reasons) is not on their electronic record.

Individuals with a Notice of Further Consideration (Health Reasons) on their record, who are seeking re-employment with the department, should contact the Organisational Health Unit on (07) 3237 1093.