

## Who ya gonna call? The Construction Nurse Line

Returning injured construction workers to work in a safe and timely manner can be particularly challenging. WorkSafeBC's nurse advisors are there to help.

Injured construction workers tend to be away from work longer than injured workers in any other industry. In June 2010 injured construction workers in BC were off the job for an average of 73 days. A variety of factors affect this prolonged duration: the types of injuries, the economy, and a perceived lack of opportunities to accommodate injured workers in this industry.

In order to give injured construction workers, their employers, and their physicians proactive assistance in developing safe, effective return-to-work plans, WorkSafeBC has created a team of construction nurse advisors who understand the nature of construction injuries, as well as the job demands and work accommodation opportunities.

Construction nurse advisors are part of WorkSafeBC's nurse advisor team that consists of about 80 registered nurses with expertise in occupational injuries, disability management, and return-to-work planning.

WorkSafeBC nurse advisors are available to assist injured workers in any industry/occupation to return to work in a safe and timely manner. They collaborate with injured workers, employers, physicians, and other health care providers to develop and monitor safe, individualized return-to-work plans. They visit the injured worker's job site to facilitate the return-to-work process or to ensure that modified duties are appropriate for the individual's temporary limitations. Since nurse advisors have access to all the WorkSafeBC claim file information, they can provide a clinical

perspective that is separate from claim entitlement and prevention issues.

### Health benefits of work attachment

Work can be a valuable part of an injured worker's therapy, preventing the excess morbidity that occurs with work absence. Physicians can play an important role in advising patients on activity and the value of a safe and timely return to work.

Statistics show that the longer an injured worker is away from the workplace, the lower the probability of returning at all. Once an injured worker is away for 12 weeks, the probability of return can be as low as 50%. After 2 years, the probability of return diminishes to only 10%.

### How nurses can help

Nurse advisors can help physicians with injured worker patients by:

- Visiting the injured worker's job site to perform a job demands analysis and facilitate return-to-work planning.
- Identifying appropriate modified duties.
- Helping to resolve return-to-work issues.
- Helping to develop safe, effective return-to-work plans.
- Supporting injured workers during their recovery.

### Billing and fee codes

Returning injured construction workers to work in a safe and timely manner can be particularly challenging. When you have an injured construction worker patient, WorkSafeBC construction nurse advisors are available to facilitate development of a return-to-work plan with your patient and

then monitor the progress of that plan.

In addition to the fees for office visits and Form 8/11, you can bill fee code 19930 for your time on the telephone with the construction nurse advisor. If the construction nurse advisor asks you to endorse the return-to-work plan, you can bill fee code 19976.

Alternatively, you can develop the return-to-work plan on your own in collaboration with your patient and his or her employer. The "bundled" fee item—fee code 19950—is available to you with the following required components:

- An office visit with your patient.
- A phone call to the employer to identify opportunities for safe work.
- Development of a specific return-to-work plan, specifying hours, activities, progression of activities, and expected date of full return to work.
- Communication of the plan to your patient, either in person or by telephone.
- Form 11 reporting the return-to-work plan to WorkSafeBC.

### Contact a construction nurse advisor

Physicians can contact a construction nurse advisor to discuss a patient's return-to-work plan by calling the Construction Nurse Line at 604 279-8155, or toll free at 1 877 633-6233, Mondays through Fridays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

For more information, visit [worksafebc.com](http://worksafebc.com). Click on Safety at Work; then, under the Industries list, click Construction; and finally, under Initiatives, click Construction Nurse Line.

To reach a nurse advisor in another industry, call 1 888 967-5377.

—Judy Reilly, RN

*This article has not been peer reviewed.*