

# Medical advisors reaching out to community physicians: A new WorkSafeBC initiative

**M**edical advisors are physicians who work at WorkSafeBC to provide medical reviews of injured worker claims. They are your colleagues and are licensed with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC. Many are accredited in sports or occupational medicine, have training in mental health, and maintain clinical practices. They regularly enlist the expertise of physician specialists in orthopaedics, internal medicine, ophthalmology, and psychiatry to support our case management teams for the benefit of injured workers.

In 2021, WorkSafeBC medical advisors will reach out to community physicians earlier in the claim process to assist with their patients' recovery and return to work. There is consensus about the value of work for injured workers—it's healthy, it contributes to recovery, and it leads to better health outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

Yet not all injured workers reap the health benefits of work. Some recover at home for extended periods—away from work and isolated from co-workers and regular routines—placing them at higher risk of suicide, obesity, heart attack, depression, and substance abuse.<sup>2</sup>

The Early Medical Advisor Involvement process involves reviewing all claims without a return-to-work plan 8 weeks after the date of injury. The medical advisor will contact the attending physician to discuss opportunities for additional treatment/rehabilitation, obstacles to the patient's recovery, and potential work opportunities if the patient is not yet ready to return to regular duties.

This allows medical advisors to collaborate with community physicians about how WorkSafeBC can assist, with the goal of functional

recovery and some form of return to work. We piloted this initiative in 2020 and have seen a positive impact from the medical advisor connecting with the injured worker's physician. Medical advisors can offer support and guidance to community physicians on the claim process and disability management, can expedite refer-

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als for imaging or specialist consultations, and can promote collaboration between community physicians and WorkSafeBC. Ultimately, the initiative aims to provide and support excellent worker care along with timely and safe return to work.

For the worker, this early review can help address outstanding medical issues in a timely and efficient manner, provide for a medically supported return to work, and keep the worker connected with the workplace and colleagues. The community physician has an opportunity for enhanced collaboration with WorkSafeBC; this integrated sharing of information optimizes care and access to resources for their patient, supports patient recovery, and promotes a greater understanding of the benefits of return to work as part of the treatment plan.

For the employer, an appropriate earlier return to work helps their employees remain connected with the workplace. Many employers can accommodate medical restrictions, offering light or modified duties while an injured worker is recovering. To date, we have seen the following outcomes:

- Earlier clarification of diagnoses, medical restrictions, and treatment plans.
- Greater understanding of the role of medical advisors and benefits of peer-to-peer collaboration among community physicians.
- Enhanced communication leading to efficient engagements and a follow-up system with community physicians.
- Early discussion of expectations, return-to-work planning, and the identification of barriers to returning to work.
- Targeted and early support for community physicians with a focus on safe, durable, and timely return to work as part of treatment plans.
- Early identification of the absence of a primary care provider, allowing for the mitigation of this common challenge.

We thank you in advance for your engagement when one of our medical advisors contacts you. Typically, your commitment will be 5 to 10 minutes, and you may bill fee code 19930 for your time. To learn more, or to discuss a patient who was injured at work, feel free to contact a medical advisor by calling 1 855 476-3049. ■

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*This article is the opinion of WorkSafeBC and has not been peer reviewed by the BCMJ Editorial Board.*