

Creating a Modified Duty/ Return-to-Work program

By Robert Schiller, AIC

Director, AmeriHealth Casualty Services



Escalating workers' compensation insurance and related costs adversely affect the profitability and efficiency of many organizations. Because workers' compensation insurance premiums are determined partially by employee injury total costs, it is in the best interest of any business to take measures to reduce the frequency and severity of employee injuries.

One way to contain injury costs is to develop and implement a Modified Duty/Return-to-Work program. A Modified Duty/Return-to-Work program is an effort to minimize the length and costs of temporary total disability associated with a work-related injury. The program allows an employer to offer an injured employee (who cannot perform the full duties of their pre-injury job classification) work with limited physical requirements.

Why develop a Modified Duty/Return-to-Work Program?

1. Reduce workers' compensation insurance costs:

Workers' Compensation premiums are determined, in part, by the frequency and cost of the injuries. If these costs are reduced as a result of the Modified Duty Program, insurance premiums will also be reduced.

2. Reduce the direct cost of time lost:

By assigning the injured employee to modified duty as soon as medically feasible, Temporary Total Disability (TTD) payments are minimized. Medical and rehabilitation expenses are better controlled because the employee is coming to work each day and feeling productive.

3. Reduce the indirect cost of time lost:

By returning the injured worker to their job as quickly as possible, costs associated with the temporary loss of the employee such as decreased production, time lost by supervision, hiring and training a replacement, and decreased efficiency of work are minimized.

4. Facilitate injured employee's recovery:

Employee involvement minimizes the potential for malingering, sets an example for other employees, and facilitates the injured employee's return to their regular job.

Tips and guidelines for successful implementation:

1. Appoint a Program Coordinator with the skills and authority to ensure that basic program parameters are observed consistently. The Program Coordinator should also serve as a liaison to injured employees, supervisors, and medical providers.
2. Develop, endorse, and distribute a Modified Duty policy statement that can be shared with all employees. Distribute this as part of your new hire program and make sure employees understand the benefits and parameters of the program before it is implemented. Limit the program to employees with temporary physical restrictions that are the result of a work-related injury.
3. Develop a written Modified Duty program and train applicable managers and supervisors about the benefits and processes of the program. They should meet on a regular basis to ensure that the jobs being performed by injured employees are not causing any additional damage and are assisting with the rehabilitation process.
4. Develop a list of potential Modified Duty jobs and prepare job descriptions that include a list of the limited physical demands. The positions do not need to be existing jobs; you can create any modified position that you deem acceptable. Work assignments should be innovative and make effective use of the employee while observing any applicable restrictions.

Examples of Modified Duty jobs include:

- Equipment cleaning
- Filing and clerical work
- General housekeeping
- Inventory
- Repair work
- Security patrol/fire watch
- Tool room attendant

5. Meet with your occupational health care provider to review your program and job descriptions. Encourage them to have specific physicians treat your employees and visit your work site so that they understand job responsibilities and requirements for return-to-work. Physical restrictions should be specified in writing by the panel physician. For municipal employers and insurers, please ensure that your providers understand that uniformed employees may also work in a modified duty capacity.
6. Ensure periodic health surveillance (based on medical provider recommendations) for all employees returning to work with restrictions. Supervisors and human resources personnel should routinely check with employees about these jobs and the progress of their rehabilitation. The duration of this limited activity should be specified and followed by an examination for the purposes of reevaluation. Indefinite periods of limited activity should not be accepted.

AmeriHealth Casualty Insurance Company and their third party administrator, AmeriHealth Casualty Services, focus on returning injured workers to employment.

Get more information

Contact Rob Schiller at
robert.schiller@ahcasualty.com
