



Occupational Injury Cost Containment

Cost containment or managing occupational injuries is not a new concept. This program is receiving growing acceptance and importance by many organizations interested in controlling insurance cost. The implementation of an effective cost containment program is an attempt to expand normal safety activities to include the management of a claim. The program would handle all claim activities from the date of injury to the successful return of the employee to productive work at a controlled cost.

When an employee suffers a work related injury, a series of events are set in motion. If the actions following an accident are not managed properly, then claim procedures become an additional problem. Injury cases that are managed improperly often result in increased medical costs and may prolong the employee's return to work. Good management for work related injury cases can significantly help in reducing cost through returning employees to work sooner and the need for legal assistance.

The objectives that affect injury case management are:

Employees – need to be aware that management is concerned about their injury and recovery. They additionally need good communication with their doctor regarding their prospects for returning to work. They need to return to work as soon as medically possible to feel productive and good about themselves.

Physicians – need information regarding circumstances of the accident as well as what the employees normal job activities encompass. Employers need to provide suggestions to physicians on potential accommodations that can be made for modified or light duty.

Employers – need to know that the employee is receiving proper medical care. They also should determine a time frame for when the employee can return to work and any restrictions they may have. They need a return-to-work program, which may include light duty work to enable workers to feel productive again.

Meeting the above objectives is the philosophy of good cost containment practice. These objectives can be achieved by the following procedures:

1. Provide necessary first aid and send injured employees to the appropriate medical provider. Details of these activities should be documented.
2. Contact the insurance company claims office the same day. This should be done by fax. This starts the claim process in a timely manner.
3. The treating physician should be informed of the following as soon as possible:

- description of the employee's physical activity on the job
 - a copy of the injury report or a description of how the injury occurred
 - a copy of the company's policies on returning employees to work
4. Contact the employee within 24 hours to check up on their condition. This expresses the company's concern and commitment for their well-being. Determine if the employee has concerns regarding their treatment and discuss any plans for returning to work.
 5. Physician follow-ups should also occur as soon as possible to determine when the employee can return to work and if there are any work restrictions for the employee.
 6. Maintain contact with the three essential figures in the injury case; the employee, the physician, and the insurance company. Weekly contact with the employee can help keep them informed about the case's proceedings. Physician contact is necessary to maintain employee health status. Insurance company contact helps to keep the claims representative aware of the situation from the companies outlook and will assist in closing the claim at the lowest possible dollar amount.
 7. All employees should be made aware of the program. The company is responsible for informing them that in the event of an injury, resulting in lost work time, that every means will be used to return them back to work at the earliest time.
 8. Keep a file of the entire process from all individuals involved for future reference.

These procedures are simple, involve limited cost and time expenditure. They are effective in achieving the objectives listed above. As soon as a formal cost containment program is established, it should be communicated to all employees so that they know what to expect in the event of an injury. This program is good for business and helpful to employees. A cost containment program keeps medical costs down and attorneys out of the process. The results of an effective cost containment program are the ability to return employees to work smoothly and the suppression of costs related to the injured employee case.