



## Learn to Return - it's good for workers and good for business

Victorian WorkCover Authority

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**November 2008**

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### WELCOME

Welcome to the November edition of *Learn to Return*. In this edition we focus on some best practise tips about how to manage return to work (RTW). We give you a sneak peak at some of the upcoming Employer RTW Network events for next year, which include some new session topics and regional locations. We also consider depression in the workplace and the new publication jointly developed by WorkSafe and Beyond Blue.

If you have any feedback or suggestions for this newsletter, we'd like to hear from you. We want this newsletter to be a valuable and relevant tool for you. [Email a suggestion.](#)

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### A BEST PRACTICE APPROACH TO THE ELEMENTS OF RTW

What is best practice? Best practice goes beyond just meeting legislative requirements and refers to the development and implementation of activities and processes recognised as being the most efficient and effective at achieving a desired outcome. When talking about RTW, best practice refers to the specific actions you perform in your workplace, above and beyond your obligations, to facilitate successful and sustainable RTW outcomes.

In this edition, we will examine the best practice approach to the management of RTW responsibilities. Often there can be several people in the workplace who are involved in RTW planning. To ensure that staff members are aware, focused and equipped to meet their responsibilities successfully, you are encouraged to consider the benefits of adopting a best practice approach. This may be demonstrated through the following example relating to a RTW Coordinator (RTWC):

Requirement:

- A RTWC is appointed

Best practice approach:

- A capable RTWC is appointed and their position description clearly explains their responsibilities.
- RTW responsibilities are periodically reviewed to make sure they meet organisational goals and legal requirements.
- Comprehensive KPIs are established for the RTWC position description.
- The RTWC has sufficient resources to enable their regular participation in RTW and injury management development opportunities (such as education and networks) in order to maintain up to date technical knowledge. The ability to regularly participate in RTW and Agent facilitated training is supported.
- The RTWC has an appropriate level of authority to influence RTW decision-making and thereby ensure that all obligations are met.

Other best practice initiatives to consider when defining RTW responsibilities in your workplace include:

- A senior manager is accountable for the organisation's overall RTW operation.
- All managers are assessed against their RTW responsibilities as part of regular performance discussions.
- People are trained in their RTW responsibilities.
- KPI's are established in all position descriptions to reflect organisational RTW goals to measure and improve RTW performance.

In the next edition of *Learn to Return* we'll consider what constitutes a best practice approach to RTW consultation and communication. If your workplace does something that you think is reflective of a best practice approach to RTW consultation, communication or responsibilities, we would like to hear about it. Email details to us at [rtw\\_networks@worksafe.vic.gov.au](mailto:rtw_networks@worksafe.vic.gov.au)

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### EMPLOYER RTW NETWORKS

#### Southern Network - Preventing & managing RTW disputes

Learn strategies aimed at identifying conflict early and how to manage and achieve resolution of RTW disputes. Be informed about practical tips from speakers

experienced in the compliance and dispute resolution process. Obtain a greater knowledge and understanding of the steps involved in the conciliation process.

**Southern Employer RTW Network**  
Topic: Preventing & managing RTW disputes  
Date: Tuesday 2 December 2008  
Time: 8.30 to 11.00 am  
Venue: Quality Inn Baton Rouge, 1233 Stud Rd, Rowville  
Melways Ref: 81 J3

Click [here](#) to register for the Southern Network on 2 December 2008.

#### **New topic at the Western Network - Developing a RTW culture**

What does a positive RTW culture look like? What role do Managers, supervisors and work colleagues play in promoting a RTW culture? Learn the essentials to developing and maintaining a strong safety and RTW culture within your organisation.

**Western Employer RTW Network**  
Topic: Developing a RTW culture  
Date: Tuesday 3 February 2009  
Time: 8.30 to 11.00 am  
Venue: Werribee Racing Club, Bulban Road, Werribee  
Melways ref: 205 E9

Click [here](#) to register for the Western Network on 3 February 2009

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#### **EMPLOYER RTW NETWORKS 2009 CALENDAR**

The Employer RTW Networks 2009 Calendar is now available. In response to participant feedback new topics will be introduced in 2009. They include:

- Developing a RTW culture
- Striving for RTW best practice

Events will continue to be held in the Western, Northern and Southern metropolitan areas of Melbourne. We have also expanded our regional networking groups to include 3 new regional locations.

In response to your feedback, network events will alternate between morning and afternoon session times. You can register for an event any time during the 90 day period preceding the event.

Click [here](#) to view the calendar

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#### **SUPPORTING THE RETURN TO WORK OF EMPLOYEES WITH DEPRESSION**

More than one million people in Australia experience depression, anxiety or related substance-use disorders each year. This equates to one in five people being affected by depression at some point in their lifetime. These figures clearly have a significant impact on Australian workplaces. As a result WorkSafe together with Beyond Blue have developed a brochure to provide information to employers about supporting the return to work of employees with depression.

While the target audience is employers, the information is relevant to most. Primarily it is aimed at helping employers recognise the signs and symptoms of depression and provides practical ideas on what to do in the workplace if an employer suspects an employee is experiencing depression. It highlights that remaining at work can play an important role in the person's recovery. It also details ideas for effective management of the return to work process.

Click [here](#) for your copy.

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#### **RECENT PROSECUTIONS**

##### **Logical Industrial Pty Ltd - Failure to forward a claim**

###### **Where can you find out more about forwarding a claim?**

- WorkSafe website – Injury and claims
- What to do if a worker is injured, A guide for employers
- The Employer Injury claim report
- Your Agent

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#### **YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED**

This is your section; please [email](#) us any RTW questions or comments you have and we will print those of broad interest and do our best to answer them.

**Q. What information should I write on the RTW Plan in the section "Steps that have or will be taken to facilitate the RTW"?**

**A.** You should include information that relates to the efforts you have made or will make to facilitate the injured worker's RTW. Some examples are:

- Engagement of an Occupational Rehabilitation Provider to assist with identifying suitable duties
- Purchase of new equipment such as a speciality chair
- Modification of a workstation/piece of equipment/work process
- Review with a company nurse or physio
- Regular contact/attempted contact with the injured worker and/or treating doctor or other practitioners to discuss ability to work and to identify suitable duties

**Q. When is a good time to engage the services of an Occupational Rehabilitation Provider?**

**A.** Once you have decided to utilise the services of an Occupational Rehabilitation Provider, and you have identified which service(s) you might require, it's best that you discuss it with your Case Manager at [your Agent](#).

There is no simple answer to this question. The timing of when you implement occupational rehabilitation (OR) services will differ from case to case and your Case Manager can help you determine when it is best to refer for OR services.

It's worthwhile remembering that OR services are available to assist in overcoming barriers in the RTW process. Common reasons for referral to OR services include:

- Difficulty identifying suitable alternate or modified duties in the workplace
- Assistance required with progressing the RTW hours and/or duties of a worker
- Prolonged difficulty communicating with treating practitioners
- A relationship breakdown between the employer and employee
- The potential that the injured worker may not be able to return to the workplace in any capacity based on their medical restrictions and therefore vocational redirection may be required.

If you have any queries about the value of occupational rehabilitation involvement please do not hesitate to discuss it with [your Agent](#)

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**RTW COORDINATOR PROFILE**

Introducing Erin Pratt, Return To Work Coordinator - VIC/TAS, Hays Recruitment

**Who do you work for?**

Hays Recruitment in the Melbourne CBD.

**How long have you been a RTW Co-ordinator?**

I've been in this role since March 2007.

**How did you get in to this role?**

I volunteered to take on the role when the previous RTW Coordinator left the company. Originally, I combined the RTW role and my previous one within the company. Now my role is of a purely RTW nature. I saw the RTW Coordinator role as an excellent opportunity for me to develop my skills and interest in OH&S.

**What do you enjoy most about your role?**

I really enjoy the human element of the RTW Coordinator role. It is a hands-on role that requires my communication, sensitivity, persistence and proactivity. I'm a natural conversationalist and in turn, an attentive listener. I enjoy that I am in continual communication with a range of stakeholders, particularly the injured worker.

I obtain a huge amount of job satisfaction from my role. It is a rewarding role where the results are tangible and obvious. Assisting people to overcome injury and personal struggle, find their own strength, and overcome obstacles gives me enormous professional satisfaction.

I also enjoy the intellectual complexity of the role. It brings together interpersonal issues, legal and procedural aspects and further planning, strategy and management which together adds up to an intellectually stimulating role. I am constantly challenged and having to think on my feet. I love being faced with challenges and having to

source answers. There is a huge investigative element in RTW, and time, patience and the search for the correct answers in the right places rewards with excellent results.

**What's the secret to your success? Do you have a key tip for someone who's new to RTW Coordination?**

I perceive the initial stages of a claim as pivotal. They set the tone for the duration and course of the claim. Keeping in touch with the injured worker and explaining the RTW process to them in these initial stages is very important. I place enormous emphasis on maintaining verbal communication with all parties, particularly the injured worker and their relevant Case Manager. It is essential that you develop strong personal and professional relationships with both internal and external stakeholders, particularly the organisation's WorkSafe Agent and its elected Case Managers. Effective and constructive relationships will allow claims solutions to be delivered with efficiency, sensitivity and an agreed mutual best interest. Developing and maintaining these relationships has allowed me to maximise the use of their skills and services.

Proactive claims management is also essential. I place an emphasis on employing preventative and strategic measures to assist in claims management. I regularly utilise the skills and services of Occupation Rehabilitation Providers to assist in a tactical response to a claim I foresee as complex or potentially expensive.

Further ongoing communication with the injured worker's treating practitioners (doctors and physios) will enable you to develop an effective an RTW Plan and Offer of Suitable Employment.

**How would your friends describe you?**

I think they would say I was hard working, dedicated and passionate in terms of my job and career ambitions. As a friend, I know they describe me as energetic, lively, supportive, empathetic and thoughtful. However, I have had friends comment that I tend to spread myself a bit wide sometimes and commit to too many things. This in turn makes me feel pressured and stressed.

**What makes you laugh?**

Spicks and Specks on the ABC – I just about cry I laugh so much.

**What drives you crazy?**

I'm a bit of a greenie and I make a big effort to recycle and lead by example. When simple recycling procedures are disregarded or ignored, I can get a bit grumpy...

**Tell us something that not many people know about you.**

A colleague of mine reminds me regularly I could 'talk under water with a mouthful of wet cement' – but I'm terrified of public speaking! I absolutely dread it. Though I wish I was better at it.

**What's your favourite weekend past time?**

I love lazy summer weekends. More recently I've been really enjoying driving down to my brother's new home at the beach. A lazy afternoon of footy, drinks and a barbie is a new favourite.

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**NEW WORKSAFE PUBLICATIONS**

- [Preventing work-related stress, Information for employees in the public sector](#)
- [Preventing work-related stress, Information for employers in the public sector](#)
- [Preventing work-related stress, Information for Health and Safety Representatives \(HSRs\) in the public sector](#)
- [Prevention and Management of Aggression in Health Services](#)

To order publications, please contact the WorkSafe Advisory service on telephone 1800 136 089 or email [publications@worksafe.vic.gov.au](mailto:publications@worksafe.vic.gov.au). Please note that delivery takes 7 – 10 days

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**SEND US YOUR IDEAS**

**Do you have any ideas or suggestions which you'd like to see in this newsletter?**

Whether it's an idea for a feature article, a question you'd like answered, or some new research you found helpful, we're keen to hear about it and may include it in the next edition of Learn to Return.

Send your contributions to [rtw\\_networks@workcover.vic.gov.au](mailto:rtw_networks@workcover.vic.gov.au)

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**SEND TO A FRIEND**

Do you know of any friends or colleagues who might also be interested in hearing about the latest in RTW?

Please feel free to forward on this newsletter or even encourage a friend to register on the [RTW Coordinator register](#).

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