Occupational Disease and Return-to-Work Strategies for Success

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Learning Objectives

By the end of this session the learner will have an appreciation of:

- the impact of occupational disease on a worker’s functional abilities
- the impact of occupational disease on an individual’s ability to work
- strategies to assess viable return-to-work options
DEFINITIONS
What is Occupational Health?

- Health of people at work
- Relationship between Occupation (work) & Health

Environment

Occupation (work)

Accidents/Exposures

Health
Definitions ILO 1993

**Occupational diseases**
Having a specific or a strong relation to occupation generally with only one causal agent (physical, chemical, biological or psychosocial) and recognized as such

**Work-related diseases**
With multiple causal agents, where factors in the work environment may play a role, together with other risk factors, in the development of such diseases, which have a complex etiology

**Diseases affecting working populations**
Without causal relationship with work but which may be aggravated by occupational hazards to health
Occupational Disease

“A disease contracted out of or in connection with work, that is characteristic of that work, or directly related to the risks specific to that work”
Four Types

- Diseases only occupational in origin
- Occupation is one of the causal factors
- Occupation is a contributory factor
- Occupation is aggravating pre-existing condition
Two main elements are present in the definition of an occupational disease:

- the causal relationship between exposure in a specific working environment or work activity and a specific disease; and

- the fact that the disease occurs among a group of exposed persons with a frequency above the average morbidity of the rest of the population.
The Hidden Epidemic

Fatal Accidents
- 321,000
- 14%

Fatal Diseases
- 2.02 million
- 86%

Work-related accidents and diseases
- 2.34 million

Burden of Occupational Disease – ILO/WHO

Worldwide

- 1.9-2.3 million deaths attributed to occupation
- 1.6 million deaths attributed to work-related diseases
- 217 million cases of occupational disease
In developing countries, occupational injury and disease rates are much higher than in North America.

Estimation for each year in the United States:
- 4,000,000 new disabling cases of occupational diseases
- 100,000 deaths from occupational disease

10 million occupational disease cases occur each year worldwide.

Occupational injuries and diseases affect many organ systems.
Generalized Costs

Costs by Disease

- Tumours: 9%
- CNS: 7%
- Respiratory Dis.: 3%
- Accidents: 3%
- Mental Disorders: 14%
- Heart Disease: 40%
- Musculoskeletal: 16%
- Skin Diseases: 8%
WSIB - Ontario

Registered Claims by Injuries and Illnesses by Registration Year

Schedule 1

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DETERMINING WORK-RELATEDNESS
The Occupational History

- Description of all jobs held
- Work exposures
- Timing symptoms
- Epidemiology of symptoms or illness among other workers
- Non-work exposures and other factors
Occupational Hazards

- Physical Hazards
- Chemical Hazards
- Biological Hazards
- Mechanical Hazards
- Psychosocial Hazards
Predominant Diseases

- Disease of the nervous system or sensory organs
  - Deafness, NIHL
  - Carpal tunnel syndrome

- Disease or disorder of the musculoskeletal system and connective tissue
  - Tendonitis
  - Epicondylitis
  - Bursitis
  - Tenosynovitis (Quervain’s)

- Disease of the respiratory tract
  - Asbestosis
  - Asthma
  - Silicosis

- Neoplasm, cancer
  - Mesothelioma
  - Malignant tumor

- Skin or subcutaneous tissue disease
  - Contact dermatitis

Sabrina Gravel
Coordinator of the Chemical and Biological Hazards Prevention research field
Paul-Émile Boileau, Ph.D. Scientific Director, IRSST
VIABILITY OF WORK
Health Management Measures

- Pre-employment screening
- Periodic health care examination
- Health promotion
- Health education
- Specific protection
- Risk assessment of working environment
Pre-employment Health Care Examination

• To determine the physical and emotional capacity of the individual to perform the job
• To provide base line health data for epidemiological and legal purposes
• To counsel the person for correction of diseases/habits which may harm later
• Assessment of pre-existing toxicity/impairment due to past exposure, if any
Periodic Health Care Examination

- Evaluation of general health status
- Early detection, control and prevention of any health disorder which may affect the ability to perform the job
- Detect deviation in health status from base line data
- Detect infectious/communicable diseases which may affect others
- Cyclical nature of the diseases
- Latency of diseases
Three Primary Factors for Work

The Worker

The Workplace

The Work
Seven Principles of Successful RTW

1. The workplace has a strong commitment to health and safety which is demonstrated by the behaviours of the workplace parties.

2. The employer makes an offer of modified work (also known as work accommodation) to injured/ill workers so they can return early and safely to work activities suitable to their abilities.

3. RTW planners ensure that the plan supports the returning worker without disadvantaging co-workers and supervisors.

4. Supervisors are trained in work disability prevention and included in RTW planning.

5. The employer makes an early and considerate contact with injured/ill workers.

6. Someone has the responsibility to coordinate RTW.

7. Employers and health care providers communicate with each other about the workplace demands as needed, and with the worker’s consent.

Institute for Work and Health, 2007
http://www.iwh.on.ca/seven-principles-for-rtw
PULLING IT TOGETHER
Occupational Diseases

- Occupational diseases have a long latency period and can be cyclical
- Most occupational diseases pose challenges in assessment and treatment
- In some situations may occur among the general community as a consequence of contamination of the environment from the workplace
- All occupational diseases can be prevented
Key Elements to Consider

• Determination of baselines
• Determination of work-relatedness
• Ongoing monitoring
• 3 factors related to work
• Commitment from employer, worker and health care team to sustain **viable** work
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Closing Thoughts ....

“I feel like a freak; doctors dismiss me; fear of losing my job.”

“No one understands that some days I feel great and others I can barely get out of bed let alone work”

“It basically affects all aspects of life including dressing and caring for my two year old son, dressing myself, tying shoes, sexual activity, household chores, household maintenance, playing sports, and ability to work.”
QUESTIONS?