MDs Support Therapeutic Effect of Work

It may have just gotten easier to convince physicians to participate in effective transitional return-to-work programs. The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons endorsed early return to work in a position paper, which found that providing transitional employment while healing can hasten recovery and reduce costs. A physician spokesman suggests accommodated activities can be better than rest and can distract workers from pain. He cites research that injured workers out two weeks or more are less likely to be employed in two years. The article doesn’t say whether the findings apply to non-occupational injury as well as workers’ compensation claims. (The Wall Street Journal, 10/24/00)

Time Not Worked Tops Benefits Cost List

Benefits cost employers an average of $14,655 in 1998, up from $14,086 in 1996, according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Payment for time not worked topped the cost list at 29% of the total.

Employee conduct improves with clear LTD benefit explanations

Problems in employee disability insurance coverage may be reduced or avoided if the benefit is clearly explained to the employee by a supervisor, human resources person, or employee handbook. A careful explanation is critical because it helps the employee understand why the employer is able to provide the coverage at no or low cost to the employees. (National Underwriter, Sept. 4, 2000)
Panel at Benefits Expo Uncovers “The Truth About Integrated Benefits”
In October, Robin Leavitt, Vice President of Marketing for CIGNA IntegratedCare, served as moderator for “The Truth About Integrated Benefits,” a panel discussion at the Benefits Expo conference in Chicago. Leavitt’s questions were directed toward panelists Karen Newby of Quantum Corporation, Gretchen VanParys of Bausch & Lomb, Inc, and Tom Parry of the Integrated Benefits Institute, a national organization that provides research and benchmarking analysis on the emerging issues of integrated benefits. To obtain an edited transcript of this panel discussion, hit “reply” to this mailbox or send a request to colleen.moran@cigna.com.

Virginia Retirement System: A Model Disability Program
Virginia has implemented a disability system that could be used as a model for other states. By combining sick leave, family and personal leave, short-term and long-term disability, and retirement, the state hopes to maintain a safety net for employees at all times. The new program imposes more responsibility on individual workers to try to return to their jobs, and sick leave is no longer carried over from year to year. In spite of implementation difficulties, 35 percent of eligible employees chose to participate in the new program. (Compensation and Benefits Review, July – August 2000)

Waiting Periods and Health-Related Absenteeism: The Need for Program Integration
There is evidence that reducing waiting period deductibles in disability insurance plans raises the amount of lost time used by insured workers and increases the cost of sick leave. Researchers believe that the evidence supports the need for an integrated disability insurance product that could be offered at lower cost than the existing system, which provides fragmented lost time coverage. (Benefits Quarterly, 3rd Qtr 2000)
Evidence of Cost Savings Grows for Integrated Disability Management

Integrated disability management (IDM) can save employers money and time in disability benefits. IDM involves the consistent management of all employee disability-related absenteeism with a single carrier. More employers have become interested in applying the IDM concept to help them reduce absenteeism rates and overall disability costs. Streamlining the disability management process eliminates duplicated efforts in the administration of lost-time programs, as well as overlapping coverage that may occur in uncoordinated programs. (Employee Benefit News, August 2000)

Return-to-Work Culture

There are a number of things employers can do to promote a return-to-work culture, both organizationally, and in the way they structure their disability benefit plan. Here are a few suggestions: track all absences and all related costs; develop transitional work programs; develop communication training programs for front-line management, and include job requirements in position descriptions. (Employee Benefit News, article by CIGNA IntegratedCare, October 2000) For a copy of the article, please hit “reply” to this mailbox or e-mail colleen.moran@cigna.com.

Missing in Action: Employee Absenteeism

Management involvement can have a significant impact on worker absences, reducing the rate by as much as 74% according to a new survey by Watson Wyatt Worldwide and the Washington Business Group on Health. The survey also found that an “employee entitlement mentality” was the reason for absenteeism most commonly cited by employers. For more results of the survey please see http://www.plansponsor.com.

Benefit Briefs: No Show

Unscheduled employee absenteeism cost employers $610 per employee last year, up slightly from $602 a year ago, despite a drop in the average rate of absenteeism to 2.1%, according to a Commerce Clearing House survey. You can read more about the CCH survey at http://www.plansponsor.com.

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