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Benefits *Bulletin*

Benefit News to Keep You in the Know and the Now

July 2017

Returning Employees to Work

Employees, especially those who have been in their role for a few years, hold a tremendous wealth of knowledge and skill that is not easily or quickly transferable to another person. When an employee must take time off work due to illness or injury, it can be a disruption to regular work flow. Therefore it is in the interest of employers to get employees back to work quickly, but also safely.

Maintain Contact

If an employee feels connected to their work, they are more likely to make a concerted effort to return. To do this, keep the lines of communication open during their leave. Determine the best method of communication for both parties (a phone conversation is more personal than an email or text) and what the appropriate frequency may be. Too frequent communication may be seen as harassing and create a sense of mistrust but too little may leave the employee feeling disconnected.

Check in periodically with regards to progress and find out what, if any, accommodations can be made to assist the employee in returning to work. However, also communicate on a more social level – let them know that they are missed and provide updates of company happenings and events. Create an atmosphere where the employee is encouraged to return.

Return to Work Plan

Have a return to work plan. Often, this can be coordinated with the disability claims manager at your insurance company if the employee is on claim.

The starting point should be to determine what, if any, accommodations need to be made in order to safely bring the employee back to work. This may include a modified work station or work schedule. Because the employee may not be able to accurately describe what accommodations he needs, have a Functional Abilities Form completed by their doctor at the company's expense. The intent of the form is not to capture confidential medical information or diagnoses, but rather to identify employee abilities and highlight potential safety concerns so that you can properly accommodate your employee.

A gradual return to work may be required – ex. a few hours each day for a few days increasing gradually each week until they can return to full employment. However, if an employee is cleared to work full time hours, consider starting them back to work mid-week so they are not burnt out by the end of the first week back.

When the employee does return to work, ensure that the HR manager and their direct supervisors are on site to support them. Allow time for a review of expectations, company policies and procedures (especially after a lengthy absence), and a transfer of

information from those who were doing the job during the leave.

It may take a few weeks for the employee to settle back into a work routine. Monitor their progress and review whether accommodations need to be modified. Get feedback from the employee, their managers, and co-workers. Provide support whenever needed and if you have an EAP, remind the employee of the services available to help in the transition back to work.

Involve Co-Workers

People rarely work in isolation so the return of a team member will impact others. Let co-workers know when the employee will be returning and what their role will be. Do not divulge personal information but advise of any accommodations that will be made. This will help to set expectations and avoid any ill-will if an employee is seen as “not pulling their weight” when in fact they are working to their current limitations.

Thank your team. When an employee is absent, other employees inevitably pick up extra work. Whether it is for the duration of the leave or while a new person is trained in that role, these are the people who pitched in to bridge the gap. Let them know that their contributions are appreciated.

Update Your Records

Overage dependent children are those who are attending a post-secondary school on a full-time basis and are over age 21 or 22 and are under age 25 or 26 (age limits can vary by contract). This information must be updated with the insurance company at the start of each school year. Failure to do so may result in declined claims. Now is a good time to remind employees that they may need to update their profile with plan administrators.

Accommodations

The Ontario Human Rights Commission has clarified what information is required to support an accommodation:

- That the person has a disability
- That there are limitations or needs associated with the disability
- Whether the person can perform the essential duties of their job with or without accommodation
- The type of accommodation required
- Regular updates about when the person is able to return to work if they are on leave

Where more information about a person’s disability is needed, the information requested must be the least intrusive of the person’s privacy while still giving the organization enough information to make an informed decision about the accommodation.

Accommodation is a two-way street – employees have an obligation to participate in their return to work plan and to notify employers of required accommodations.

<http://ohrc.on.ca>

Quiz Corner

Put your mental mettle to the test and a \$50 prize in your pocket!

What is the next number in the series?

3 6 18 21 63 ??

Send your answer to: info@gmsinsurance.com or by fax to 905-670-4146.

Our May Quiz Whiz was Patty Zurbrigg who knew the correct answer was:

Nine

Congratulations!