CHALLENGES OF RETURN TO WORK FOR THE MEDICAL AND VOCATIONAL CASE MANAGER

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OBJECTIVES

- Explain the role the case manager plays in facilitating communication between multiple parties involved in a Workers Compensation claim
- Describe how the case management process assists the injured worker to obtain a successful medical outcome
- Identify ways the vocational counselor can assist an injured worker to overcome barriers and successful RTW
COMMUNICATION

“Communication (from Latin "communis", meaning to share) is the activity of conveying information through the exchange of thoughts, messages, or information, as by speech, visuals, signals, writing, or behavior” (Wikipedia, 2012).
WHY COMMUNICATION IS IMPORTANT

...AND THAT IS WHY WE LIFT ON THREE...
Types of Communication

- Nonverbal
- Oral/Verbal
- Written
  - Formal/informal
  - Email
  - Text
- Sign language
COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Oral
- Presentation
- Audience Awareness
- Critical Listening
- Body Language

Written
- Academic Writing
- Revision and editing
- Critical reading
- Presentation of data

Non-Verbal
- Audience Awareness
- Personal Presentation
- Body Language

Communication Skills
BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

- Physical
- System
- Attitudinal
- Psychological/emotional
- Physiological
- Word ambiguity
- Cognitive/linguistic ability
PARADIGMS

We all have “filters” or paradigms through which we see the world. Our attitudes, assumptions, beliefs, experiences, needs & values greatly impact how we view the world, how we communicate with others, how we listen to others and how we feels in certain situations.
PARADIGM AWARENESS

- Effective communication with those who share our Paradigms
- Effective communication with those who do not share our Paradigms
RULES TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

- Do not be judgmental
- Avoid labeling
- Listen
- Let bad be bad
- Avoid psychoanalyzing
- Avoid inappropriate reassurance
- Use empathy
- Be aware of body language
- Be as assertive communicator
Effective Case Manager Communication

- Communication is the underpinning of everything we do in case management.
- Why is effective communication so difficult?
  - Fragmented health care system
  - Time demands of providers
  - Trust issues between CM, providers, clients, employers, attorneys, adjusters
  - Attitudinal barriers of involved individuals
Effective Case Manager Communication

- Building a trusting relationship
- Looking beyond current situation and creating client goals
- Creating partnerships between involved parties and maintaining equality
- Maintaining client advocacy role
CASE MANAGEMENT DEFINED

“Case management is a collaborative process that assesses, plans, implements, coordinates, monitors, and evaluates the options and services required to meet the client's health and human service needs. It is characterized by advocacy, communication, and resource management and promotes quality and cost-effective interventions and outcomes. “(CCMC Website, 2012)
WC CASE STUDY

Mr. Jones is a 5‘9” ironworker of Hispanic descent who sustained a L4-L5 disc herniation and left distal clavicular fracture as a result of a slip and fall accident in his parking lot. After conservative treatment failed, a laminectomy was completed, but also failed. A fusion was recommended by the neurosurgeon but the client chose not to have it done. He has continued with physical therapy.

Mr. Jones reports that he is able to stand for less than 1 hour and walk for up to 45 minutes, and sitting is a non issue. He reports having difficulty with sleeping due to pain. He has symptoms of sciatica radiating down the lower left extremity and left hip pain in the joint. He is currently taking Percocet, Lyrica, Cymbalta, and Valium to manage his symptoms.

Mr. Jones is attending physical therapy 3x per week. He is receiving E-Stim while at therapy to help regenerate the nerve that has been damaged.

Mr. Jones has restrictions of no lifting more than 5 lbs, limited bending to 5x per hour, sit/stand option, and no climbing and heights for 6 months.
FACTORS TO CONSIDER FOR CASE MANAGEMENT

- Mr. Jones did not graduate from high school
- Although Mr. Jones speaks English proficiently, English is his second language
- Mr. Jones’ employer can not accommodate restrictions but is wanting Mr. Jones back to work ASAP
- Mr. Jones is angry with his employer for not accommodating restrictions and now wants nothing to do with the employer
- The claims adjuster is having a hard time understanding the need for continued therapy and medication and is asking the case manager to get this file to MMI ASAP
- The claims adjuster and employer are questioning Mr. Jones’ commitment to recovery because he does not seem to be willing to communicate with the employer anymore
CASE MANAGEMENT

- You were asked to re-open this file to attend the appointment with the neurosurgeon who recommended the fusion and now you are trying to get the client to decrease his use of pain meds and move him to MMI.

- Your assessment and plan?
Medical and Vocational CM’s Working Together
ACHIEVING A RETURN TO WORK
VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION DEFINED

“Vocational rehabilitation is process to overcome the barriers an individual faces when accessing, remaining, or returning to work following injury, illness, or impairment” (Holmes, 2007)
WHAT/WHO IS A VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELOR/VOCATIONAL CASE MANAGER?

- Master’s educated counselor with a background in medical and psychological disabilities
- Specifically trained in assisting people with employment barriers in returning to work
- Posses some type of national certification (CRC, CDMS, etc)
Basic Overview of Voc Rehab

- Determining if the injured worker is a candidate for Voc Rehab
- Career Exploration and Developing a Plan
- Following a Plan
- Finding a Job
RTW Model for Vocational Rehabilitation

- Return to work same job/same employer
- Return to work different job/same employer
- Return to work same job/different employer
- Return to work different job/different employer
- Obtain re-training to RTW with a new employer
LIFE’S BIGGEST BARRIER

WHETHER YOU
THINK YOU CAN,
OR THINK YOU CAN'T,
YOU'RE RIGHT.

{HENRY FORD}
COMMON RTW BARRIERS FOR PEOPLE WITH INJURIES/DISABILITIES

- Amount of time off work
- Physical restrictions
- Limited transferable skills
- Low or limited education
- Limited technology skills
- Transportation
- Geographical area
STRATEGIES FOR OVERCOMING BARRIERS

- Taking advantage of volunteer opportunities to show new work on a resume
- Utilizing the knowledge and experience of the VRC to identify jobs appropriate to injured person’s physical restrictions
- Limited transferable skills?? Don’t forget to look at avocational skills
STRATEGIES CONTINUED…..

- Community resources to enhance educational level and technology skills
- Community resources for transportation assistance
- Identifying jobs in rural areas
CASE STUDY CONTINUED...

Let’s re-visit Mr. Jones. Our medical case manager has assisted Mr. Jones in reaching MMI and his treating physician has released him to return to work with the following restrictions:

No lifting more than 5 lbs, limited bending to 5x per hour, sit/stand option, and no climbing and heights for 6 months.

Mr. Jones will be continuing physical therapy during the beginning of his job search.
FACtORS TO CONSIDER FOR VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

- Mr. Jones is not a high school graduate
- Mr. Jones has worked as an ironworker for 15 years and has limited transferable skills
- Mr. Jones has only basic computer skills; he can utilize email and surf the internet; he specifically utilizes bay to buy and sell items
- Mr. Jones has not worked in any capacity for 1 ½ years since his injury.
REFERENCES

- Holmes, J. 2007; *Vocational Rehabilitation*
- Nunez, P. 2008; Workers compensation & return to work: It’s all about communication; *Professional Case Management*; 13;4.
- Wikipedia, 2012; Communication