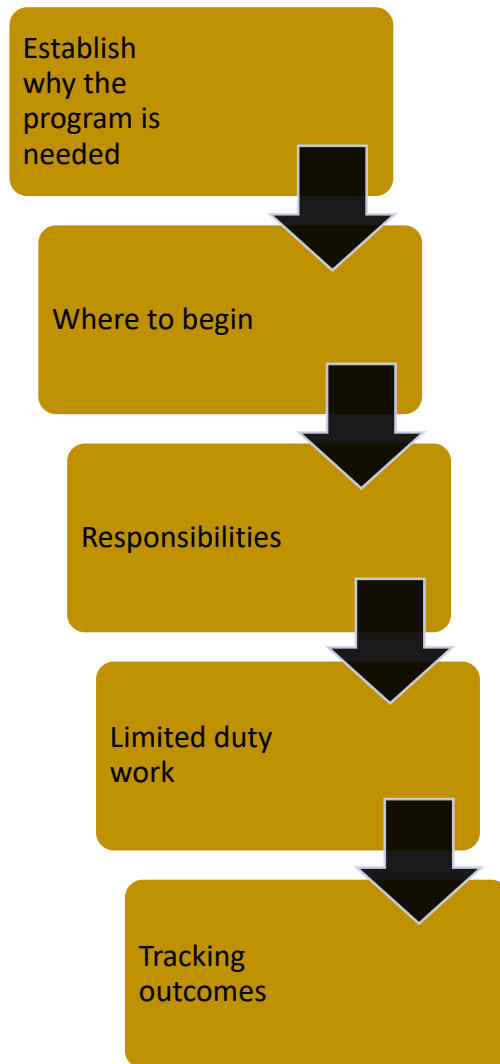# GUIDE TO DEVELOPING A MODIFIED DUTY PROGRAM

Key elements to a successful modified duty program.

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A Guide to Designing and Managing a Modified Duty Program

Key elements to a successful program start with understanding why a program is necessary. A modified duty program is designed to facilitate the earliest possible return of an injured worker to the workplace, performing meaningful work within their physical capabilities. The program should have a time limitation and offered only to those employees with temporary restrictions.

Establish why the program is needed

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Where to begin

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Responsibilities

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Limited duty work

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Tracking outcomes

Why develop a return to work program

Everyone benefits but most importantly the greater benefit is for the employee. Physical activity can aid in shortening the recovery process. Increased physical activity and interaction with coworkers may reduce anxiety, relieve uncertainty regarding job security, and retain job skills.

Most employees want to return to work. The longer an employee is out of work, the more difficult it is to return. A successful return to work program provides an environment for the employee to safely ease back to work.

Maintaining an open line of communication lets the employee know that their employer cares.

- Benefits of having a return to work program

  - Recovery time is shortened.
  - Concerns about continued employment are eliminated.
  - Loss of physical fitness due to inactivity is averted.
  - Full or partial wages are earned bringing the injured employee's income closer to pre-injury wages.
  - Maintaining job skills.
  - Less likely to experience secondary complications such as depression that may delay or complicate recovery.
  - Permanent disability associated with the injury is reduced.
  - Maintain company benefits and seniority.
  - Require less medical care and medication.
  - Family and social lifestyles maintained.
  - Avoid financial difficulties.
  - The Claims Professional and nurse will support your program.

Where to Begin
Commit to the process and be sure to gain management support. Success for the program starts at the top.

Clearly communicate throughout the organization the reason for the program, the benefits, and the need for support. All levels of management play a key part in the success of the program, be sure to clearly address questions or concerns.

Defining the policy

Careful planning is required when establishing the foundation of a good program. Involve key stakeholders in the development of the program. Things to keep in mind during development are current policies, collective bargaining agreements, and state regulations.

Steps to consider for a successful program

- Outline the purpose and scope of the program.
- Decide on the expected outcomes that are important to management
- Will alternative work assignments or accommodations be made?
- Assignments must be consistent and follow medical guidelines and limitations.
- Establish timelines for transitional assignments. Be sure to consider and coordinate with other policies such as attendance, leave, FMLA, or other requirements when establishing timelines.
- Provide the employee written documentation; every employee should clearly understand the policy.
- Participation should be mandatory and not optional once a position is available.
- Work limitations will vary; be flexible when developing meaningful assignments.
- Consider developing templates to use for communicating with the employee, department and medical provider. For example, have a letter of understanding for the employee to review and sign.
- Be innovative when considering work assignments for the program. This may require collaboration with other departments.
- Post the policy for all to see. Make it known that you care about your employee and want to help with returning safely to work.
- Does your organization have required return to work forms? If so, should they be part of this process? Are they too restrictive when developing transitional work?

Identify a return to work coordinator

Designate someone to coordinate the return to work policy and activities. Depending upon the size of the organization, and volume of program participants, this person may share other duties. This person will help assure that information is received and provided to the correct individuals, answer questions, talk to the Claims Professional, doctors, nurse, the injured employee, and supervisors. Make sure that everyone knows who the responsible person is and how to contact them. Necessary for success is having a clear, documented understanding of the coordinator's responsibilities.

Responsibilities

Define the responsibilities all key stakeholders

- Return to Work Coordinator

One the most important roles is the that of the RTW coordinator. The coordinator is the point of contact that answers questions and key to the success of the program.

- Human Resources

Often the Human Resources department will be required to collaborate with the employee and/or supervisor. Keep them engaged in the process. Consider them a partner in the process.

- Supervisor

The employee's supervisor is a key stakeholder in the process. A common question for supervisors is why bring them back to work if they are not yet full duty? As the employer, you care about their wellbeing and should remain in constant contact with the employee.

- Injured Employee

The employee will be required to acknowledge the program and participate once they qualify. They are required to notify their medical provider that modified duty is available. Consider adding information in the new hire packet, personnel manual, or notification once an injury occurs.

- Medical Provider and/or employer's occupational medical services

The medical provider must be notified in the beginning of care that modified duty work is available. The employee, nurse case manager, and Claims Professional should communicate the message. Do not rely on one party to be the messenger. A form letter announcing modified duty, on your letterhead, and from management is very effective.

- Nurse case manger

The nurse case manager must be informed and have a clear understanding of the program. The nurse should make certain the employee, medical provider, and Claims Professional are aware and have the same understanding. Keep the nurse informed if the employee has difficulty with the task assigned.

- Claims Professional

The Claims Professional manages the entire claim. Be sure to keep the Claims Professional informed of the program and when the work status changes. A change in status may impact the employee's benefits.

Identifying limited duty work

- If an employee's work limitations resulting from a work-related injury are permanent, the employee should not be placed in the program.
- Work should be productive and useful to the operation and complies with the employee's medical restrictions, allowing for a safe return to work.
- Allows the employee to progressively return to full, pre-injury duties.
- Transitional work is temporary.
- Consider assignments in other departments. Innovation and creativity are helpful as sometimes you can look outside of the employee's department for administrative duties. For example, a job may exist elsewhere and/or be a big help to another department. They may avoid the need for the outside temporary office staffing.
- Monitor the employee's progress to ensure compliance with restrictions
- Regularly meet with the employee to address any concerns.
- Document the employee's progress.
- Training may be required.
- Offer the modified duty assignment to the employee, document with an email or letter.
- If the employee refuses to accept the modified duty assignment, immediately notify the Claims Professional.

Payment of Benefits

Benefits	Payroll	Regulatory benefits	Coding

Benefits may be covered by the employer and or workers' compensation. Establish guidelines on how the employee will be paid. Work with your payroll department to establish necessary coding and requirements. Inform those responsible for entering payroll. If temporary partial benefits are paid by the Claims Professional, payroll records will be needed.

Tracking Outcomes

Measure outcomes to determine what works. Be flexible and willing to modify the program when needed.

Consider tracking,

- Participants name, date in and date out
- Did the assignment work? If there were challenges what were they and how adjusted?
- Are you able to determine if some assignments are better than others?
- Collaborate with the nurse and Claims Professional for feedback
- Celebrate and evaluate the successes

The Cycle

Modified Duty   **Full Duty**

Injury occurs and the claim is accepted

Physcian treats and releases employee to work with restrictions

Supervisor works with RTW coordinator to find work, notifies the Claims Professional

Employee returns to modified duty.

Injury occurs and the claim is accepted

Physcian treats and releases employee to work without restrictions

Employee notifies supervisor and Claims Professional

Employee returns to work