



JOB READY SERVICES

YOUR STAMP OF APPROVAL FOR WORKPLACE FITNESS

April 2014 Issue



ARE FIREFIGHTERS (AND OTHERS) RETURNING TO WORK TOO EARLY?

In *ADVANCE*, a journal for physical therapists, a recent article titled “Dousing the Flames: Therapists Need to Do More to Help Firefighters Overcome Injuries,” by Orlando Gomez, indicates that firefighters are often released to return to work too early, resulting in recurring injuries and sometimes disability. Firefighters (and police officers, too) should be treated as athletes. Gomez explains that studies have shown that the exertion and VO₂ max levels (VO₂ is a measure of the volume of oxygen that is used by your body to convert the energy from the food you eat into energy molecules) can reach extremely high levels quickly and for long periods of time among firefighters. If you add to this the amount of stress their body takes in carrying a 50 lb pack of equipment and protective wear while performing their duties, it is easy to see why injuries and recurring injuries happen.

There is also a certain “machismo” attitude (not exclusive to men!) among this population. As a result, when asked if they are ready to return to work, the answer is almost always “yes”, even when they probably are not ready. Furthermore, as in most worker’s comp cases, healthcare providers tend to focus on the area of injury and the standard “return to work” protocol for that particular type of injury versus overall functional abilities. This is often based on medical stability rather than the person’s safe ability to return to work. Without a functional assessment prior to return to work, injured workers are often put at risk for re-injury.

Gomez makes the point that asking a firefighter to lift a box with weights or push a sled or walk on a treadmill, does not prepare them for returning to their job safely. Although these standard tools can certainly be useful in treatment protocols, a good work conditioning program will add more job specific tasks to determine safe ability. Most employers require firefighters to pass a fire-related fitness test when they return, but if the tasks on the fitness test are not integrated into their treatment program, they will be put at risk in passing that test.

This is true for any injured worker – a daily, progressive program of work conditioning will increase the injured worker’s chances for a successful

Our Services:

- Functional Capacity Evaluations
- Work Conditioning
- Job Analyses
- Fit for Duty Testing
- Employment Testing

return to work and decrease their chances of re-injury. Ideally, a Fit For Duty functional test, based on the physical demands of the job, is the best way to determine the injured worker's safe ability to work. A FFD will allow healthcare providers to focus on the work-related deficit(s), rather than on other conditions that are not related to the injury or to the worker's safe ability to work. This will decrease their time out of work and will assist the healthcare providers in providing appropriate treatment.



Gomez concludes his article citing a need for education for all parties involved in assisting injured firefighters – physicians, therapists, trainers, case managers and insurance adjusters. He also cites a recent study by Kim Favorite, a fitness coordinator with the Seattle Fire Department: “...Discharge criteria allows a firefighter to return to work at about 60% to 70% of their potential fitness level.” (2007, NIH Grant Application. “Assessing the Need for Firefighter Clinical Pathways to Mitigate Re-injury”, Kim Favorite) As Gomez notes, by putting our firefighters at risk of re-injury, we are putting our communities at risk as well as costing millions of dollars in medical costs, etc.

Although not all injured workers will need the rehabilitation level that our “community heroes” need, each injured worker deserves the level of treatment that will allow them to prevent re-injury and return to work safely. After all, they are likely to be a hero to someone in their life!

-Submitted by RJ Totten, Work Conditioning Coordinator at Job Ready Services and Personal Trainer

APRIL LUNCH & LEARN

Thursday, April 24, 2014 12:00-1:00 at Job Ready office

Speaker: Debra Lord, PT, President of Job Ready Services



Topic: The Forensics of the FCE

Learn how to educate doctors about an invalid FCE and what it really means to be “invalid”. Learn how to prevent unnecessary disability from misreading or misinterpreting the FCE.

Cost: \$12.00

To register, please call or email Michelle Morgan at michelle.morgan@jobreadyservices.net, or visit our website at www.jobreadyservices.net.

UPCOMING EVENTS

“The Nuts and Bolts of Successful RTW/SAW Programs” – Debra Lord, speaker at the CAI “Ask the Expert” Series (www.capital.org) – April 22 & 23

NC Statewide Safety Conference, May 13-16 in Greensboro: Visit the WorkSTEPS/Job Ready booth!

“Workplace Discrimination Based on Safety” – Debra Lord, Keynote Speaker, Eastern Carolina Health and Safety School – May 1 & 2 in New Bern, NC

“Controlling Worker’s Comp Costs: Reducing Work Disability from Hire to Retire” – Debra Lord, speaker at Carolinas Center for Hospice and End of Life Care – 2014 Leadership Conference on May 8th in Asheville

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We have Spanish-speaking staff for daily work conditioning visits.