

Uncovering the Root Cause of Pain through Physical Therapy

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Situation

Musculoskeletal disorders – injury or pain in joints, ligaments, muscles, nerves and tendons – are the second largest contributor to disability worldwide, with lower back pain being the single leading cause of disability globally. Some disorders arise suddenly and are short-lived, such as fractures, sprains and strains; however, others lead to lifelong conditions associated with chronic pain and disability¹.

These conditions cause a host of problems for employers – absenteeism, lost productivity, increased healthcare and workers' compensation costs. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports that musculoskeletal disorders account for an average of 11 days away from work and 31 percent of workers' compensation costs². More specifically, back injuries are the most common type of workplace injury among employees according to the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA)³.

Uncover and Treat the Root Cause of Pain

When musculoskeletal disorders cause chronic pain and disability, it is important to uncover the root cause of pain to prevent delayed return-to-work and mounting claim costs. Physical therapy acts like a detective by working to identify the root cause. Once that happens, a treatment regimen can be established to break the pain cycle.

For example, a patient may be experiencing pain and tightness in the shoulder area. The problem may actually be from the neck, not the shoulder; however, the pain source, not the root cause, is often addressed. Patients are prescribed medications to help ease the pain, but there is no long-term solution. Instead, a physical therapist should provide the patient with a regimen of neck treatment to address the root cause of the shoulder pain and tightness.

A 2016 report from The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) stated that non-pharmaceutical pain treatment, such as physical therapy, might do a better job at controlling pain conditions over other, more popular treatment options⁴. When a severe injury or pain occurs, physical therapy should be the first choice of treatment.



Early and Active Engagement

The quicker a patient connects with a physical therapist after injury, the quicker trust is established. A physical therapist can then encourage a patient to become actively engaged in their recovery verses just being a passive recipient of it.

Research suggests that patients achieve better outcomes and help drive lower costs when they have the skills and confidence to manage their own health⁵. Similar to engaged employees leading to increased productivity, engaged patients lead to shorter recovery timelines.

Summary

Physical therapy's success is a result of a multi-pronged approach – engage early; identify and treat the location of the injury, not the source of pain; and encourage the patient to play an active role in their recovery. This helps mitigate a host of issues - re-injury, surgery, chronic pain and mounting claim costs.

Solution

One Call's physical therapy coordination team partners with its high-quality network providers to set patients up for success. We stay involved every step of the way to ensure the injury, not just the pain, is being treated.

The results speak for themselves:

Initial Contact

- On average, our team makes initial contact with a patient in half the time as our leading competitor
- Patients generally see a physical therapist within two days following initial contact

Upon Discharge

- More than 90 percent of our client's injured workers have minimal to no pain
- More than 90 percent have functional strength and are able to return to normal work duty
- More than 85 percent have functional range of motion

Learn More About One Call's Physical Therapy Solutions

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1 Musculoskeletal Conditions Fact Sheet. (2018, February 15). Retrieved from World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/musculoskeletal-conditions>

2 Brandy C. Workplace injuries and illness and employer costs for workers' compensation. US Dept. of Labor / Bureau of Statistics. 2016(10). <https://www.bls.gov/spotlight/2016/workplace-injuries-and-illnesses-and-employer-costs-for-workers-compensation/home.htm>

3 Common Back Injuries in the Workplace. (2017, May 2). Retrieved from Polsky, Shouldice & Rosen, P.C.: <https://workerscompy.com/common-back-injuries-workplace/>

4 CDC Guidelines for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain. (2016). Retrieved from Center for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/rr/rr6501e1.htm>

5 What the Evidence Shows about Patient Activation: Better Health Outcomes and Care Experiences; Fewer Data on Costs. (2013, February). Retrieved from Health Affairs: <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/full/10.1377/hlthaff.2012.1061>