

WorkGain: Stakeholder Experiences of a Work-specific Rehabilitation Program

A collaboration between the University of Adelaide and WorkGain Solutions

CONSUMER SUMMARY

What is the project about?

The use of simulated workplaces which replicate real job tasks and experiences and promote safe practice and re-training for workers with a physical or mental health injury, is well-established in injury rehabilitation. Here, graded job tasks are used to progressively rebuild one's capacity to return to work. However, surprisingly little is known about the acceptability of this rehabilitation approach. Our study addressed this knowledge gap.

What did the team do?

We interviewed 13 injured workers (10 males, 3 females, age range 30-63 years) who completed a unique rehabilitation program in South Australia. In this program, return to work services are offered alongside physical therapy and rehabilitation counselling. To allow breadth and depth of perspectives, 4 allied health staff and managers involved in this program were also interviewed. Injured workers were asked to reflect on their experiences and satisfaction with work-specific simulation rehabilitation. Staff were asked about the feedback that they had received from clients about their tailored rehabilitation. The data were then examined for key patterns and themes.

What were our findings?

Our data highlighted the benefits of using work-specific simulation as part of a comprehensive rehabilitation program. The resources required to ensure accurate simulation across multiple job tasks and the need to expand this rehabilitation service were also discussed. Staff additionally noted the importance of early collaboration and communication with a client's case managers, employers, and other health professionals to ensure successful return to work – although they acknowledged the challenges of this coordinated approach.

Who will use the results - and how?

The project team will share these findings with researchers, practitioners, and service providers - including presentations at the 2023 Rehabilitation Counsellors Conference, organised by the Australian Society of Rehabilitation Counsellors (16-17 May 2023), and the Self-Insurers of South Australia association (which represents our state's largest private and public sector employers). We are also exploring ways to build on our data to better understand service providers' experiences of return-to-work processes. In the longer term, we hope to help more South Australians with a severe injury not only return to meaningful work sooner but also remain employed.

Citations

Dorstyn, D., Oxlad M., Whitburn, S., Fedoric, B., Roberts, R., Chur-Hansen, A. (2023). Client and staff perspectives regarding effective work injury rehabilitation. *Australian Health Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1071/AH22256>

Dorstyn, D., Oxlad, M., Whitburn, S., Fedoric, B., Roberts, R., Chur-Hansen, A. (2023). The value of job simulation rehabilitation: a qualitative study. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*. Manuscript in press.

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