A review of the role and training of Return to Work Coordinators in Australia

J Bohatko-Naismith, DA Rivett, C James, M Guest

Joanna Bohatko-Naismith, BOHS, MWIMOR, School of Health Sciences, Faculty of Health, The University of Newcastle.

Professor Darren A Rivett, BAppSc (Phty), MAppSc (Manip Phty), PhD, Head Of School, School of Health Sciences, Faculty of Health, The University of Newcastle.

Dr Carole James, Dip COT, BSc(OT), MHSc(OT), PhD, Senior Lecturer, School of Health Sciences, Faculty of Health, The University of Newcastle.

Maya Guest, BOHS, BMedSc(Hon) GCPPracTertTeach, Lecturer, School of Health Sciences, Faculty of Health, The University of Newcastle.

Address for correspondence: Joanna Bohatko-Naismith, BOHS, MWIMOR, School of Health Sciences, The University of Newcastle, University Drive, Callaghan NSW 2308.

Email: Joanna.bohatko-naismith@newcastle.edu.au

Abstract

Two decades ago the role of the Return to Work (RTW) Coordinator was introduced to the Australian workplace and they are now critical in the facilitation of workplace RTW. RTW Coordinators are required to manage the successful transition of the injured worker to their pre-injury position, develop and implement RTW programs, accommodate the injured worker with suitable duties and provide clear guidance on the workers compensation process. In most jurisdictions an individual is employed or nominated by their employer to fill the role of workplace RTW Coordinator. Currently a jurisdictional disparity exists in the role requirements and training received by Australian RTW Coordinators. There is little research on the background required to effectively perform the role, or whether current training is meeting the needs of the RTW Coordinator. This paper aims to provide an overview of the literature pertaining to the RTW Coordinator role and training available in Australia.

Keywords: Return to Work Coordinator, workplace injury management, workplace disability management.

Introduction

Due to the significant increase in the cost of workers compensation in the 1980s, radical changes occurred within the Australian workers compensation system. The emphasis on financial settlement was replaced with greater accountability of the
employer and improved occupational health and safety within the workplace focusing on injury prevention. However, the most innovative change to occur was the introduction of rehabilitation of the injured worker in the workplace. WorkCover NSW (the workers' compensation body in New South Wales, Australia) and agencies in other states of Australia promoted the notion that occupational rehabilitation in the workplace would be efficacious for all concerned. Occupational rehabilitation is workplace focused and aims to maintain the injured employee within the workplace or return them to appropriate employment in a timely, safe, durable and cost-efficient manner. A tangible reduction in workers compensation costs, along with a reduction in illness and disability duration have been some of the identified benefits of workplace rehabilitation. The evidence supports early intervention in the RTW process leading to significantly positive results for injured workers, with the preferred setting for rehabilitation in large Australian organisations being the workplace. For workplace-based rehabilitation to be effective, coordination of the process is essential due to the number of stakeholders involved. In most states of Australia the coordination of this process is facilitated by a workplace RTW Coordinator.

A RTW Coordinator is defined as "an employee nominated by an employer (or a contractor engaged for the role) whose principal role is to assist injured workers to return to work in a safe and durable manner. The RTW Coordinator also ensures that the policies and procedures in an employer's return to work program are followed". A systematic review of RTW interventions identified several studies supporting the presence of a workplace RTW Coordinator, which suggests they are critical to the facilitation of the RTW process. Regular and timely contact with RTW Coordinators has been shown to be effective in reducing the extent of work disability and associated costs. Lack of support and assistance by key personnel such as RTW Coordinators in the workplace may reduce an injured worker's motivation to return to work and furthermore compromise the RTW process. Workplaces with proactive RTW Coordinators are more likely to have success with RTW programs, with RTW Coordinators viewed by some injured workers as a positive influence from the perspective of feeling safe and supported within the workplace.

RTW Coordinators manage the workplace coordination of the RTW process with the medical coordination usually facilitated by the general practitioner (GP). Essentially, a coordinated and collaborative approach between all stakeholders should enable the effective management of the RTW process. However, often the relationship between the GP and the RTW Coordinator can be encumbered, particularly when it relates to patient information. Any tension between the two stakeholders can therefore potentially influence the RTW process. Notably, GPs believe RTW Coordinators require an in-depth knowledge of the workers compensation system to prevent delays or hindrance in the RTW process.

In the past, various models have been proposed for the RTW process. The micro, meso, macro social theory framework highlights the importance of organisational structure and human interaction in the RTW process. This multi-level framework provides an insight into where and how obstacles or blockages may occur in the process. Negotiation with stakeholders at all levels of this framework is important for the role of the RTW Coordinator to be discharged effectively. The micro level
relates to the daily interactions the RTW Coordinator has with the injured worker, while the meso level requires the RTW Coordinator to negotiate the organisational culture and management structures. Finally, the RTW Coordinator must understand and negotiate the macro level, which involves the external stakeholders (notably the nominated treating doctor, allied health professionals, the insurer, and the legislative and regulatory bodies). The RTW Coordinator constantly moves between all three levels, placing them in a unique position to identify the obstacles hindering a successful RTW outcome. To successfully operate within the multi-levels of the micro, meso, macro framework, the RTW Coordinator must have the necessary skills, determination and diplomacy to adequately fulfil their important role of facilitating the injured workers to their pre-injury duties at the workplace.\textsuperscript{19,20}

In Australia, each state and territory government is responsible for enforcement of their own workers compensation laws and policies. Although the goals of the states and territories are similar, their respective schemes vary. Each jurisdiction is responsible to ensure workers compensation legislation is implemented and enforced, and to further ensure that all participating stakeholders are familiar with their respective roles.\textsuperscript{21} According to the Heads of Workers’ Compensation Authority\textsuperscript{22}, there are currently 10 separate workers compensation schemes operating in Australia, seven state, one territory-based and two Commonwealth legislated\textsuperscript{3} (see Figure 1). In Australia, workers compensation insurance for most employers is managed by private insurance companies with some exceptions. For instance, the Commonwealth Government has its workers compensation managed by Comcare\textsuperscript{22}, an organisation that is responsible for all government agencies.\textsuperscript{23} In addition, Seacare\textsuperscript{24} which is a scheme for seafarers employed on certain ships engaged in trade or commerce, and finally other organisations that are self-insured\textsuperscript{25}. Employers that are self-insurers need to be approved by their respective health and safety regulators, and this in turn provides them with a licence to manage their own compensation claims and have full responsibility for their claim liabilities.\textsuperscript{25,26} Australian legislation places the responsibility of rehabilitation with the employer, often with the direct worksite coordination being assigned to a RTW Coordinator. However, in the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory there is no legislative requirement for a workplace RTW Coordinator, as this role is provided by an external rehabilitation provider.\textsuperscript{27,28} International compensation systems and workplace rehabilitation practices differ slightly from those in Australia, although fundamentally they are all focused on achieving a successful RTW outcome for injured workers. International comparisons are important as benchmarking tools; however, they can also be notoriously problematic due to differences in definitions and compliance.\textsuperscript{29,30}
In 2003 the Productivity Commission in Australia began an inquiry into possible frameworks for workers compensation and occupational health and safety with the intention of establishing nationally consistent arrangements. National harmonisation of the occupational health and safety (OHS) laws was introduced in January 2012, with states implementing the changes to begin national uniformity. Following harmonisation of the OHS legislation, the harmonisation and development of a consistent workers compensation system in Australia has been highlighted for consideration. The current state-based arrangements differ significantly in regards to services and provisions for the injured worker and their family, creating inconsistencies across state borders.

With the contemporary focus on early RTW following an injury, the presence of a RTW Coordinator is considered pivotal to facilitate early intervention in the RTW process. Despite the accepted importance of the role of the RTW Coordinator in Australia, little research has been undertaken nationally (and indeed internationally) to clearly determine the background required for the RTW Coordinator role and whether current training is meeting the needs of the RTW Coordinator. This paper reports on a literature review that aimed to identify the RTW Coordinator role and training needs.

Methods

Literature search

A literature search of databases CINAHL, Medline, Embase, Cochrane Library, PsycINFO, Scopus, and Web of Science was conducted in April 2011 to identify studies or reviews relating to the workplace RTW Coordinator. The methodology involved a search using keywords including “return to work coordinator”, “RTW Coordinator”, “disability evaluation”, “occupational management” “and disability management”. Medical subject headings (MeSH terms) were also used for the search, including “disability management”, “vocational, rehabilitation” and “occupational health services”. In a recent paper Gehanno et al recommend using a combination of MeSH and non-MeSH terms when using Medline to identify relevant studies on return to work. An experienced librarian assisted with the literature search to
maximise comprehensiveness. Due to the limited number of articles identified the search was extended to include Google Scholar to capture any grey literature on RTW Coordinators. Finally, a second Google Scholar search was required to locate relevant documents from Australian regulatory bodies and Australian government departments.

Selection criteria
The search was confined to the English language and restricted to articles from 1987–2011 to encompass all relevant literature since the NSW Workers Compensation Act required employers to be involved in the RTW of injured workers. All relevant articles were included if they were discussion papers, literature reviews, qualitative studies or quantitative studies. Articles were included if they reported workplace return to work coordination by a RTW Coordinator (or other similar titles) and were excluded if they did not meet this specific criteria. All documents from Australian regulatory bodies and Australian government departments which included information on the RTW Coordinator role and training were also retained.

Results
A total of 198 articles were identified and reviewed by the primary author with 40 complete articles being retrieved based on discussion of the coordination of workplace rehabilitation of injured workers. Examination of the 40 full-text articles led to the retention of 10 articles that specifically reported coordination of workplace rehabilitation by a workplace RTW Coordinator. The lists of references from the 10 articles retained were also hand-searched for any other relevant publications. From the hand-search five further articles were identified as relevant and retained. A Google Scholar search for grey literature located seven articles which were retained. A second Google Scholar search further identified a total of 11 documents from Australian regulatory bodies (seven) and from Australian government departments (four). As a result of widening the search an additional 11 articles were located and retained. (see Figure 2).
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Figure 2: Flowchart of the review process

It should be noted that literature specific to the role and training of RTW Coordinators was often not identified in the abstract. However this information was referred to within the paper itself, therefore the paper was included as part of this review. According to Verbeek et al, most studies in this area rely on hand-searching to locate relevant articles. A total of 22 articles were therefore retained, with 12 relating to the role of the workplace RTW Coordinator, two pertaining specifically to RTW Coordinator training and the final eight articles examining both the RTW Coordinator role and training (see Table 1). Table 1 presents the identified literature on the RTW Coordinator's role and training, highlighting the key findings within each paper.
Table 1: Summary of findings from included publications on the workplace Return to Work Coordinator’s role and training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Findings re role and training of RTW Coordinator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Innes</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Discussion paper</td>
<td>Workplace-based occupational programs compare very favourably with more traditional clinic-based programs and should be strongly supported.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franche et al</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Systematic review</td>
<td>Moderate evidence that workplace RTW interventions, with the presence of a RTW Coordinator can reduce disability duration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lysaght et al</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Qualitative study (interviews)</td>
<td>Effectiveness of the involvement of a RTW Coordinator as source of information and support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muenchberger et al</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Qualitative study</td>
<td>External stakeholders believe workplace RTW Coordinators require an understanding of the inherent complexities of the rehabilitation process to further enhance their role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreman et al</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>A South Australian-based study suggesting a coordinated approach between RTW stakeholders is essential, particularly linking the clinician and the workplace personnel involved with the injured workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southgate et al</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Qualitative study</td>
<td>Australian RTW Coordinators in health care facilities are committed to returning injured nurses to work in light of shortages of qualified nurses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stahl et al</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Qualitative study</td>
<td>The complexity of cooperation between stakeholders is exposed, with trust being the key condition in stakeholder cooperation to facilitate positive RTW outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lingard et al</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Qualitative study</td>
<td>Greater attention and legal compliance is required in the RTW process in the Australian construction industry by providing workplace RTW coordination for injured workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmorland et al</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Qualitative study</td>
<td>Employee’s perception of the role of the RTW Coordinator and the importance of communicating with injured workers and the need to respect their opinions when establishing and managing disability management policies and practices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1: Summary of findings from included publications on the workplace Return to Work Coordinator’s role and training

| Author                  | Country | Year  | Design       | Findings re role and training of RTW Coordinator                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------|---------|-------|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| James et al\(^4\)       | Australia | 2011  | Qualitative study | Understanding the issues faced by RTW Coordinators and the importance of organisational structures in which they work.                                                        |
| MacEachen et al\(^49\)  | Canada  | 2006  | Systematic review | Workplace supervisors managing RTW coordination can be seen as an unwanted burden.                                                                                              |
| Ammendolia et al\(^52\) | Canada  | 2009  | Qualitative study | A five-step program was developed for occupational low back pain and the key feature of the program is having trained RTW personnel coordinating the process.                     |
| Gardner et al\(^46\)    | Canada  | 2010  | Qualitative study | RTW Coordinators are essential contributors to the RTW process. Specific competencies were identified to achieve this success. However, more emphasis on mentorship and observation is required to develop and evaluate necessary skills in this area. |
| Pransky et al\(^41\)    | Canada  | 2010  | Qualitative study | Results of this study can be applied to improve RTW Coordinator selection, training and development.                                                                         |
| Kenny\(^51\)            | Australia | 1995  | Exploratory study |                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Franche et al\(^33\)    | Canada  | 2005  | Literature review | Expanding the RTW Coordinator role and their training to include problem-solving and work accommodation planning will lead to improved satisfaction among injured workers.            |
| Larsson et al\(^53\)    | Sweden  | 2003  | Qualitative study | Employers’ experiences of planning workplace rehabilitation and associated costs and the need for in-service training at the workplace.                                          |
| Holmgren et al\(^30\)   | Sweden  | 2007  | Qualitative study | Workplace supervisors are key persons in the RTW process and in this study they provide their perspective on the complexity of the role and the opportunity to take part in training courses.          |
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<tr>
<td>Korycki et al</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Qualitative study</td>
<td>Insights from individuals with chronic disabilities resulting in work absence suggest training of service providers in the RTW system and collaboration between RTW and health care services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tjulin et al</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Qualitative study</td>
<td>This study reveals barriers for implementation of workplace-based RTW interventions. Among the barriers identified was training of key stakeholders which was essential along with continuous communication and feedback during the RTW process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaw et al</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>This study revealed variations in the role and training of workplace-based RTW Coordinators. Based on current RTW Coordinator activities six competency-based domains were identified for future training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmorian et al</td>
<td>Australia, Canada</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Discussion paper</td>
<td>Comparison of RTW Coordinators’ role and training in Australia and Canada. The study revealed that Australia has a stronger emphasis on workplace-based disability management programs emphasising job accommodation and provision of suitable duties.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RTW = return to work

Table 2: The Return to Work Coordinator: Training and accreditation requirements in Australian workers compensation jurisdictions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Direct worksite coordination</th>
<th>Training length</th>
<th>Type of training and accreditation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WorkSafe ACT 28</td>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
<td>No legislative requirement</td>
<td>Approved insurer and employer</td>
<td>10 days recommended, not legislated</td>
<td>Certificate IV Government (Injury Rehabilitation Management) (PSP40904)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian government Comcare 10</td>
<td>Comcare Case manager</td>
<td>Employer nominated (recommended, not mandatory)</td>
<td>1.2 days</td>
<td>1. WorkCover approved training course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WorkCover New South Wales 9</td>
<td>New South Wales Return to Work Coordinator</td>
<td>Employer nominated if greater than 20 employees</td>
<td>1.2 days</td>
<td>1. WorkCover approved training course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<th>Training length</th>
<th>Type of training and accreditation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WorkSafe</td>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>No legislative requirement</td>
<td>Approved insurer and employer</td>
<td>2.1 day</td>
<td>2. Advanced RTW coordination * NSW, QLD and Vic have developed an add-on course for RTW Coordinator to be able to understand legislative and operational requirements in other states.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WorkCover</td>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>Initially managed by a WorkCover Queensland Customer Advisor unless the company wages are in excess of 5.577m or is a high-risk industry with wages in excess of 1.63m. Then they must have a Rehabilitation and Return to Work Coordinator</td>
<td>Employer nominated</td>
<td>3 days or 100 hours equivalent, legislated</td>
<td>3 units of competency as per National Training Information Services (Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board approved) * NSW, QLD and Vic have developed an add-on course for RTW Coordinators to be able to understand legislative and operational requirements in other states.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian government</td>
<td>Seafare</td>
<td>No legislative requirement</td>
<td>Employer or Claims Manager</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WorkCover</td>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>Rehabilitation and Return to Work Coordinator</td>
<td>Employer nominated if greater than 30 employees</td>
<td>Length of training not available</td>
<td>Level 1 training for low-risk employers (base levy rate of less than 4.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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<th>Title</th>
<th>Direct worksite coordination</th>
<th>Training length</th>
<th>Type of training and accreditation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WorkCover Tasmania\textsuperscript{50}</td>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>Return to Work Coordinator</td>
<td>Employer nominated if greater than 50 workers</td>
<td>No specified time frame</td>
<td>Level 2 training for all other employers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WorkSafe Victoria\textsuperscript{58}</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Return to Work Coordinator</td>
<td>Employer nominated</td>
<td>2 days recommended, not legislated</td>
<td>Training course developed and endorsed by WorkSafe Victoria * NSW, QLD and Vic have developed an add-on course for RTW Coordinators to be able to understand legislative and operational requirements in other states.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WorkCover Western Australia\textsuperscript{48}</td>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>Injury Management Coordinator or managed by the employer</td>
<td>Only by employer unless he appoints Injury Management Coordinator</td>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>Injury Management for employers only</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Productivity Commission, Workers Compensation in Australia\textsuperscript{37} used to inform discussion

Discussion

Jurisdictionally, there are significant differences with the role requirements and training of RTW Coordinators in Australia. There is limited research on the background required to effectively perform the role, and whether current training is meeting the needs of the contemporary RTW Coordinator. The purpose of this review was therefore to synthesise the existing literature pertaining to the workplace RTW Coordinators’ role and training, and begin a discourse on important issues relevant to the emerging role of RTW Coordinator.

Much of the RTW literature originates from Canada and Sweden, with both countries emphasising the employer’s responsibility regarding workplace rehabilitation.\textsuperscript{29,30} Studies in Australia and internationally have identified that RTW Coordinators may have wide and varied backgrounds\textsuperscript{36,40} with many being from the medical, ergonomic or allied health professions\textsuperscript{36} and others coming from human resource
administration. However, in some instances in Australia, RTW Coordinators are employees of the company with no particular background. Employees such as clerks, secretaries, tradesmen or others who volunteer for the role, and often have little relevant training. A recent Australian study indicated some RTW Coordinators wore “many hats”, not only holding the role of RTW Coordinator but also performing their regular duties within the workplace, with others being employed on a part-time basis with minimal time to perform the role.

Role

A review of the literature highlights that one of the most important roles within the RTW process rests with the RTW Coordinator. Their presence in the workplace has emerged as a significant factor in facilitating positive RTW outcomes. Notably, the title of RTW Coordinator varies between the states in Australia (see Table 2) and in the international context RTW Coordinators are known as disability managers or disability supervisors. The primary role of the RTW Coordinator is to manage the successful transition of the injured worker to their pre-injury position at the workplace in a safe and durable manner. Additionally they are required to develop and implement RTW programs, accommodate the injured worker with suitable duties and provide injured workers information on the workers compensation system.

It has been suggested that the RTW process is random and unpredictable, and causes perplexity among key stakeholders. The RTW process can involve complex interactions between the worker, employer, insurance company, the nominated treating doctor (GP) and allied health professionals. Thus another important role of the RTW Coordinator is to promote effective communication and collaboration between the various stakeholders, which is essential for the effective management of the RTW process.

In 1995 an Australian study highlighted deficits of the workplace RTW Coordinator role and reported injured workers were unhappy with the RTW Coordinator and their lack of understanding of the role. It has been identified that RTW Coordinators often lack the required knowledge, or have difficulty establishing a rapport with the injured worker, skills that are essential for the successful outcome of RTW. RTW Coordinators themselves expressed difficulty when managing inherent conflicts and advocating for the injured worker while maintaining loyalty to the employer. RTW Coordinators also expressed uncertainty in relation to their responsibility in the rehabilitation process and how far they should extend themselves. Indeed, another Australian study in 2004 found some organisations did not provide RTW Coordinators with a job description, which indicates the role was not formalised, and allowed it to be performed in an ad hoc manner. Similarly, a recent study in Canada suggested the role of the RTW Coordinator was poorly described with limited information on the skills, attributes and knowledge required for the role. The authors further state that “this role has not been systematically inventoried or supported by well-documented, independent research, using accepted methods of competency validation” (p 42). RTW Coordinators therefore remain unclear regarding the guidance and qualifications necessary, and how best to develop the important skills required to facilitate the RTW process.

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RTW Coordinators acknowledge that they require specialised knowledge of the workers compensation system and a solid understanding of the organisational structure of their workplace, along with recognising the importance of timely and early RTW for injured workers. RTW Coordinators are often the first point of contact for the injured worker, however injured workers have reported feeling vulnerable and unsupported and are often unsure of the process, procedures and their entitlements following an injury. The fundamental attributes for the role of the RTW Coordinator are the ability to communicate effectively, maintain confidentiality, and be empathetic and trustworthy in the RTW process. The emotional toll on the RTW Coordinator also needs to be considered as the role encompasses many different elements. It is essential that the RTW Coordinator does not take on a counsellor role or try to solve the injured worker’s personal problems. A Canadian study undertaken in 2008 described and highlighted six preliminary competency domains that require consideration in the development of further specialised training for the RTW Coordinator. Based on their findings, the competency domains are [1] ergonomic and workplace assessment; [2] clinical interviewing; [3] social problem solving; [4] workplace mediation; [5] knowledge of business and legal aspects; and [6] knowledge of medical conditions. Specifically, for a successful RTW and rehabilitation to occur the RTW Coordinator must have a solid understanding of the process and practice to confidently promote a safe and durable RTW for the injured worker. The significant changes that have occurred in Australian legislation over the last decade have created greater responsibilities for the RTW Coordinator and highlighted the need for appropriate training.

Training

Employing a RTW Coordinator is not mandatory in some states and territories in Australia. Often employees are appointed with the responsibility, rarely receive the appropriate training required and struggle when facilitating the RTW process. The duration of training administered to RTW Coordinators by Australian health and safety regulatory bodies varies significantly across the states and territories, ranging from one day to 100 hours or equivalent. Furthermore, there are many differences in the type of training provided to Australian RTW Coordinators, such as accredited training which is developed and endorsed by health and safety regulatory bodies and competency-based training taken from the Australian Qualifications Framework (see Table 2).

Internationally, competency-based training is being considered and promoted as a means to assist meeting the requirements of the role of the RTW Coordinator. In Canada, the National Institute of Disability Management and Research (NIDMAR) has developed a Certificate in Disability Management for RTW Coordinators to meet the needs of the role. Similarly, findings from two Canadian studies in 2008 — Korkczyk and Shaw — support the development of educational training programs for RTW service providers to further assist them in conveying information effectively to injured workers. Interestingly in Sweden, supervisors responsible for initiating all of the necessary collaborations for the injured worker reported that they no longer wanted the responsibility for returning injured workers to pre-injury duties as they

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believed they had insufficient knowledge and were not fully competent to cope with the requirements of their duties.\textsuperscript{30,37,53}

A submission to the Productivity Commission in 1994 from the Labour Council of NSW argued that the effectiveness of the RTW Coordinator has diminished due to insufficient training provided.\textsuperscript{57} Further submissions to the Commission recommended mandatory training and accreditation of workplace RTW Coordinators by the relevant authorities, renewable every 12 months.\textsuperscript{57} Recent interest in this area has grown in Canada with two studies documenting the competencies required to perform the role of RTW Coordinator.\textsuperscript{36,41} Following a review of the literature in 2008, Shaw et al concluded that training based on expert opinion and ad hoc surveys was being provided to the RTW Coordinator,\textsuperscript{36} with RTW Coordinators remaining without direction about the required skills or qualifications necessary to facilitate the RTW process.\textsuperscript{36} In 2010, Pransky et al highlighted that further improvement in RTW outcomes is more likely if more attention was paid to the training and selection of RTW Coordinators.\textsuperscript{41} Given the increasing demands of the RTW Coordinator role and the pivotal part it plays in the RTW process, it is arguable that closer attention needs to be paid to their professional development, peer support and mechanisms to promote ongoing education and innovation in the field.

Study limitations

Studies that directly discuss the specific contribution of the RTW Coordinator in workplace RTW coordination are scarce. Indeed most of the literature encompasses studies that have some element of limited discussion on the RTW Coordinator role and training. It should be noted that these studies generally do not specifically relate to workplace RTW Coordinators, rather the process itself, however they do highlight some areas relevant to the role and training of workplace-based RTW Coordinators. Due to the limited relevant literature available it was necessary to include all publications (research articles, discussion papers, government documents) that provide some discussion related to RTW Coordinators.

Conclusion

The role of the RTW Coordinator is continually evolving\textsuperscript{36} with respect to both the organisational structure and human interactions within the RTW process. Although it is a requirement of most Australian workplaces to employ a RTW Coordinator, there is little research and discussion on the background required and the training a RTW Coordinator requires to successfully manage the complex RTW process. There is a comprehensive amount of evidence suggesting the workplace is an effective setting for occupational rehabilitation.\textsuperscript{25} Furthermore, provision of workplace rehabilitation reduces delays in starting the process of early RTW, strengthens employer-employee links, and helps ensure the worker does not become detached from the workplace.\textsuperscript{8,57} Identifying a set of national competencies specifically for Australian workplace RTW Coordinators is essential to meet the needs of injured workers and achieve greater national consistency in the role of the RTW Coordinator. Steps to begin the process of harmonisation of the workers compensation systems nationally in Australia should arguably begin with enhancing the homogeneity of the role across jurisdictions as well as standardising and improving training for the RTW Coordinator. WorkCover NSW, WorkCover Victoria and WorkCover Queensland
have consulted and initiated such change by providing RTW Coordinators with a training program enabling them the opportunity to learn about RTW in other state jurisdictions. Training and ongoing professional development are some mechanisms where greater consistency in the role of the RTW Coordinator across jurisdictions might be achieved. These findings emphasise the need to review the role and further investigate the background, qualifications and training of RTW coordinators. Research is urgently required to understand the role and training of Australian RTW Coordinators in the various jurisdictions to determine whether they are appropriately equipped to optimally perform their function as facilitators of the RTW process.

Reference

A review of the role and training of Return to Work Coordinators in Australia


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