

AN EMPLOYER'S PERSPECTIVE

Insights from
the Industry



Keeping services aligned with clients' needs is a top priority for occupational health providers. To achieve this, it's important to continually remain engaged with employers to learn about their operations and ways your company's healthcare programming can benefit their employees.

There's never going to be any one-size-fits-all answer for occ health, as every client has unique circumstances with regard to workplace injuries and illnesses. But there is one common thread every client and health provider relationship can benefit from; listening to each other is the surest path to success.

To provide some employer perspective, we spoke with Ron Peters, lead safety coordinator and injury management with NiSource, a major utility provider based in Merrillville, IN. NiSource is a diverse company in terms of what it needs from its occupational health programming. It has employees working in heavy industrial settings and office buildings alike. It also works closely with numerous

different types of contractor companies on a regular basis.

NiSource takes workplace safety seriously and considers its corporate-wide culture of safety to be the forefront of its occupational health policies. Every level is involved in the practice of preventing workplace accidents and eliminating hazards. If an accident should occur, all parties are included in actions such as investigating the accident, learning from it, and making sure it doesn't happen again.

In his role with NiSource, part of Peters' responsibilities involve injury management. For the most part, this entails assisting the injured employee in getting the right kind of treatment and accommodating their return to work. Given that his role puts him in contact with almost every party related to a workplace injury, he offered some interesting suggestions for occupational health providers. Let's take a look.

An Audit Process

The biggest suggestion Peters had for occupational health providers is they should be providing an

audit process to their clients. This should test and critique the whole spectrum of injury prevention and response – from reviewing safety programs and policies, to evaluating the workforce, identifying areas for improvement, and more.

“Part of caring for the employee should also involve occupational health companies conducting evaluations of everything that could impact the health and recovery of an individual,” Peters said. “They should have a seat with us at the table to help us find new ways to review and improve our safety.”

Ease of Access

Establishing a network of clinics and facilities that make it convenient for individuals to receive treatment is key, particularly in an emergency. Your occupational health company needs the right facility partnerships in place to deliver ease of access.

“Geographically, we have to make sure that an injured employee can get treatment as fast as possible in an emergency,”

Peters said. “That’s most important. For non-emergencies, we provide options for our employees. We provide them with maps and choices for places they can receive treatment in their areas. We make it easy for them.”

Qualities of a Good Medical Director

The individual managing an occupational health program, in this case referred to as a medical director, serves as the go-to person for treatment coordination.

“It’s very important for us to have a medical director that can represent us at multiple facilities,” Peters said. “Good communication skills and being well-informed about OSHA recordables and the variables present in our industry is also very valuable to us.”

In many aspects that parallel other industries, the medical director for a company’s occupational health program is much like the account representative you’d find in other client relationships. They should have a well-rounded understanding of the types of injuries and hazards their clients’ employees can encounter as well as ways those injuries can be promptly addressed.

Education for Every Tier

When an employee gets injured at NiSource, their immediate supervisor accompanies them to the emergency room or clinic to receive treatment. The supervisor is not present in the actual exam rooms, but they do discuss restricted duty topics with the physicians after the employee has been treated. In instances like these, the supervisor is the

best person to understand how restricted duty will impact both the company and the employee and can help find ways to make accommodations.

It doesn’t stop there. Injury tracking and management that takes place after the initial exams is conducted by Peters’ office. He also manages the claim and helps get employees connected with the right treatment. NiSource’s senior management is part of the process too, conducting accident investigations and assisting all the other levels.

With so many hands on deck, communication and education from occupational health providers is essential. Supervisors need a clear understanding of what their role and duties will be if an accident occurs. Part of this education will come from the employer, but occupational health providers should be involved as well to both enlighten and understand how their clients manage an injury.

The Common Goal

When occupational health providers collaborate with their clients on things like safety and better treatment pathways, great things can happen. Everyone is a stakeholder in safety and recovery. Everyone shares the common goal of keeping workers protected and enabling the success of companies. For that reason, everyone should be involved in finding ways to improve.



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